WORLDS OF TOMORROW

JUNE 1964
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THE TWERLIK
Jack Sharkey

THE GREAT DOOMED SHIP
J. T. McIntosh

WHAT THE DEAD MEN SAY
Philip K. Dick

ON MESSENGER MOUNTAIN
One of his companions was human but dead. The other was living—but was it a man?
A Complete Short Novel
GORDON R. DICKSON

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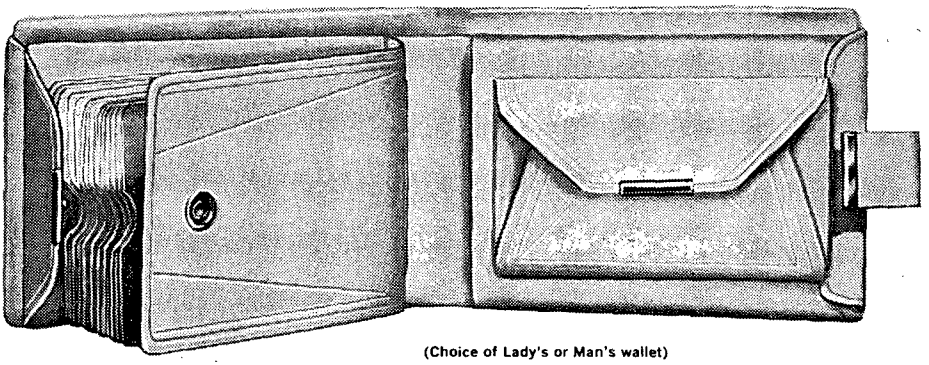

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WORLDS OF TOMORROW®

JUNE 1964

Vol. 2 No. 2

ALL NEW STORIES

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RENAISSANCE MAN, Mark II

We spent the other evening reading C. P. Snow's latest thoughts on "The Two Cultures." In his first work by that title, a couple of years ago, Snow called attention to the widening gap between the literary and technological intelligentsias, each headed at breakneck speed into new areas of experience and each finding it increasingly hard to communicate with the other . . . or, indeed, to see what in the other's experience may be worth communicating about. There is no doubt that the mutual dull incomprehension has gone far. "We never talk to mathematicians," the Oxford dons told Snow; his scientific acquaintances returned the compliment by describing writers as not only silly, but wicked. And so, say Sir Charles —

> the great edifice of modern physics goes up, and the majority of the cleverest people in the western world have about as much insight into it as their neolithic ancestors would have.

True for him, of course. You can verify it for yourself by interviewing a representative sampling of "clever people". The significance of his observations is not merely that it is true, but that it is tragic. The great edifice of modern science must be understood if anything at all is to be understood about our world — since all our lives are shaped by it, have been extended and enriched by it, and may if we are not careful be terminated by it.

Snow's new thoughts on the subject are embodied as an appendix in the book which is now called *The Two Cultures and a Second Look.* He has not changed his mind about either the gap or the need for closing it. The two cultures have got to learn to talk to each other, he says, because they need each other. And yet it is difficult. There is simply too much to learn, he says; "In the conditions of our age, or any which we can foresee, Renaissance man is not possible. But we can do something . . . There is no excuse for letting another generation be as vastly ignorant . . . as we are ourselves."

Clearly the "Renaissance man" Snow is talking about is the sort of man who, like Pascal (whom

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he cites), can understand, and contribute to, both theology and probabilistic mathematics, both philosophy and hydrostatics . . . who can, in short, deal with all the activity at the forefront of human learning. Such a man is indeed rare today. Question is, was such a man ever anything but rare?

In another section of his book, Snow expresses his astonishment at the failure of most people to realize how degraded were the conditions of life for the average human being a few centuries ago. Barring a tiny, statistically insignificant group of well-to-do persons at the top of the heap, the condition of the human race was abject. And so, he says, "No one should feel it seriously possible to talk about a pre-industrial Eden, from which our ancestors were, by the wicked machinations of applied science, brutally expelled."

It seems to us that by the same token no one should feel it possible to talk about a "Renaissance man" whose breed has been rendered extinct by the divergent paths of the arts and the sciences. In any statistically meaningful sense, Renaissance man never existed either. If Pascal could grasp in one lifetime the meaning of the work being done in a dozen fields, it was to a great extent because so little original work was being done in *any* field. There simply were not the people to do it. For every da Vinci, there were ten thousand stolid, stunned Italian peasants who could not hope to do creative work in any areas because they had not even the concept of creativity, much less the leisure, the training or the knowledge. For every Pascal, there were ten thousand French youths who died before they were quite fully grown.

One of the main functions science fiction has performed — we're not saying we planned it that way; but it is what has happened, all the same — has been to help to reconcile the Two Cultures. In one science-fiction story or another we can get a pretty full picture of the edifice of modern science — not a blueprint, but an artist's rendering. In other stories we can see what this edifice will house in the way of a humanity that is changed and shaped by it.

In fact, we think that Renaissance Man, Mark II, is with us today, and that a fair number of the species are reading these words right now.

It can't be helped, you see. The accelerating growth of modern science does two things. First, it demands that we learn to understand it — not only for fear of our lives, but for fear of our jobs. Second, it gives us the means of doing so — gives us leisure time; gives us mass-communications media; gives us the basic education to build upon.

Undoubtedly we need more people who are interested in, and try to find out, what the other fellow is up to. But we think these people are coming along. The great rebirth of the fifteenth century will be more than overmatched by that of the late 20th and 21st.

Mankind has always been good at mastering his environment, after all. Now his environment is largely the science and technology he himself has made . . . and he will master that too. — *The Editor*

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ON MESSENGER MOUNTAIN

BY GORDON R. DICKSON

ILLUSTRATED BY MORROW

It was a long, hard trek up the mountain. What made it harder was the alien who tagged along!

I

It was raw, red war for all of them, from the moment the two ships intercepted each other, one degree off the plane of the ecliptic and three diameters out from the second planet of the star that was down on the charts as K94. K94 was a GO type star; and the yelping battle alarm of the trouble horn tumbled sixteen men to their stations. This was at thirteen hours, twenty-one minutes, four seconds of the ship's day.

Square in the scope of the laser screen, before the Survey Team Leader aboard the *Harrier*, ap-

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peared the gray, light-edged silhouette of a ship unknown to the ship's library. And the automatic reflexes of the computer aboard, that takes no account of men not yet into their vacuum suits, took over. The *Harrier* disappeared into no-time.

She came out again at less than a quarter-mile's distance from the stranger ship and released a five-pound weight at a velocity of five miles a second relative to the velocity of the alien ship. Then she had gone back into no-time again — but not before the alien, with computer-driven reflexes of its own, had rolled like the elongated cylinder it resembled, and laid out a soft green-colored beam of radiation which opened up the *Harrier* forward like a hot knife through butter left long on the table. Then it too was gone into no-time. The time aboard the *Harrier* was thirteen hours, twenty-two minutes and eighteen seconds; and on both ships there were dead.

"*There are good people in the human race,*" Cal Hartlett had written only two months before, to his uncle on Earth, "*who feel that it is not right to attack other intelligent beings without warning — to drop five-pound weights at destructive relative velocities on a strange ship simply because you find it at large in space and do not know the race that built it.*

"*What these gentle souls forget is that when two strangers encounter in space, nothing at all is known — and everything must be. The fates of both races may hinge on which one is first to kill the other and study the unknown carcass. Once contact is made, there is no backing out and no time for consideration. For we are not out here by chance, neither are they, and we do not meet by accident.*"

Cal Hartlett was Leader of the Mapping Section abroad the *Harrier*, and one of those who lived through that first brush with the enemy. He wrote what he wrote as clearly as if he had been Survey Leader and in command of the ship. At any moment up until the final second when it was too late, Joe Aspinall, the Survey Leader, could have taken the *Harrier* into no-time and saved them. He did not; as no commander of a Survey Ship ever has. In theory, they could have escaped.

In practice, they had no choice.

When the *Harrier* ducked back into no-time, aboard her they could hear the slamming of emergency bulkheads. The mapping room, the fore weight-discharge room and the sleeping quarters all crashed shut as the atmosphere of the ship whiffed out into space through the wound the enemy's beam had made. The men beyond the bulkheads and in the damaged sections would have needed to be in their vacuum suits to survive. There had not been time for that, so those men were dead.

The *Harrier* winked back into normal space.

Her computer had brought her out on the far side of the second planet, which they had not yet surveyed. It was larger than Earth, with somewhat less gravity but a deeper atmospheric envelope. The laser

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screen picked up the enemy reappearing almost where she had disappeared, near the edge of that atmosphere.

The *Harrier* winked back all but alongside the other and laid a second five-pound weight through the center of the cylindrical vessel. The other ship staggered, disappeared into no-time and appeared again far below, some five miles above planetary surface in what seemed a desperation attempt to gain breathing time. The *Harrier* winked after her — and came out within five hundred yards, square in the path of the green beam which it seemed was waiting for her. It opened up the drive and control rooms aft like a red-hot poker lays open a cardboard box.

A few miles below, the surface stretched up the peaks of titanic mountains from horizon to horizon.

"Ram!" yelled the voice of Survey Leader Aspinwall, in warning over the intercom.

The *Harrier* flung itself at the enemy. It hit like an elevator falling ten stories to a concrete basement. The cylindrical ship broke in half in midair and bodies erupted from it. Then its broken halves and the ruined *Harrier* were falling separately to the surface below and there was no more time for anyone to look. The clock stood at 13 hrs., 23 minutes and 4 seconds.

The power — except from emergency storage units — was all but gone. As Joe punched for a landing the ship fell angling past the side of a mountain that was a monster among giants, and jarred to a stop. Joe keyed the intercom of the control board before him.

"Report," he said.

In the Mapping Section Cal Hartlett waited for other voices to speak before him. None came. He thumbed his audio.

"The whole front part of the ship's dogged shut, Joe," he said. "No use waiting for anyone up there. So — this is Number Six reporting. I'm all right."

"Number Seven," said another voice over the intercom. "Maury. O.K."

"Number Eight. Sam. O.K."

"Number Nine. John. O.K. . . ."

Reports went on. Numbers Six through Thirteen reported themselves as not even shaken up. From the rest there was no answer.

In the main Control Section, Joe Aspinwall stared bleakly at his dead control board. Half of his team was dead.

The time was 13 hours, 30 minutes, no seconds.

He shoved that thought from his mind and concentrated on the positive rather than the negative elements of the situation they were in. Cal Hartlett, he thought, was one. Since he could only have eight survivors of his Team, he felt a deep gratitude that Cal should be one of them. He would need Cal in the days to come. And the other survivors of the Team would need him, badly.

Whether they thought so at this moment or not.

"All right," said Joe, when the voices had ended. "We'll meet out-

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side the main airlock, outside the ship. There's no power left to unseal those emergency bulkheads. Cal, Doug, Jeff — you'll probably have to cut your way out through the ship's side. Everybody into respirators and warm suits. According to pre-survey —" he glanced at the instruments before him — "there's oxygen enough in the local atmosphere for the respirators to extract, so you won't need emergency bottles. But we're at twenty-seven thousand three hundred above local sea-level. So it'll probably be cold — even if the atmosphere's not as thin here as it would be at this altitude on Earth." He paused. "Everybody got that? Report!"

They reported. Joe unharnessed himself and got up from his seat. Turning around, he faced Maury Taller.

Maury, rising and turning from his own communications board on the other side of the Section, saw that the Survey Leader's lean face was set in iron lines of shock and sorrow under his red hair. They were the two oldest members of the Team, whose average age had been in the mid-twenties. They looked at each other without words as they went down the narrow tunnel to the main airlock and, after putting on respirators and warmsuits, out into the alien daylight outside.

The eight of them gathered together outside the arrowhead shape of their *Harrier*, ripped open fore and aft and as still now as any other murdered thing.

Above them was a high, blue-black sky and the peaks of mountains larger than any Earth had ever known. A wind blew about them as they stood on the side of one of the mountains, on a half-mile wide shelf of tilted rock. It narrowed backward and upward like a dry streambed up the side of the mountain in one direction. In the other it broke off abruptly fifty yards away, in a cliff-edge that hung over eye-shuddering depths of a clefted valley, down in which they could just glimpse a touch of something like jungle greenness.

Beyond that narrow clefted depth lifted the great mountains, like carvings of alien devils too huge to be completely seen from one point alone. Several thousand feet above them on their mountain, the white spill of a glacier flung down a slope that was too steep for ice to have clung to in the heavier gravity of Earth. Above the glacier, which was shaped like a hook, red-gray peaks of the mountain rose like short towers stabbing the blue-dark sky. And from these, even as far down as the men were, they could hear the distant trumpeting and screaming of winds whistling in the peaks.

They took it all in in a glance. And that was all they had time to do. Because in the same moment that their eyes took in their surroundings, something no bigger than a man but tiger-striped and moving with a speed that was more than human, came around the near end of the dead *Harrier*, and went through the eight men like a predator through a huddle of goats.

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Maury Taller and even Cal, who towered half a head over the rest of the men, all were brushed aside like cardboard cutouts of human figures. Sam Cloate, Cal's assistant in the mapping section, was ripped open by one sweep of a clawed limb as it charged past, and the creature tore out the throat of Mike DeWall with a sideways slash of its jaws. Then it was on Joe Aspinall.

The Survey Team Leader went down under it. Reflex that got metal cuffs on the gloves of his warmsuit up and crossed in front of his throat, his forearms and elbows guarding his belly, before he felt the ferocious weight grinding him into the rock and twisting about on top of him. A snarling, worrying, noise sounded in his ears. He felt teeth shear through the upper part of his thigh and grate on bone.

There was an explosion. He caught just a glimpse of Cal towering oddly above him, a signal pistol fuming in one big hand.

Then the worrying weight pitched itself full upon him and lay still. And unconsciousness claimed him.

II

When Joe came to, his respirator mask was no longer on his face. He was looking out, through the slight waviness of a magnetic bubble field, at ten mounds of small rocks and gravel in a row about twenty feet from the ship. Nine crosses and one six-pointed star. The Star of David would be for Mike DeWall. Joe looked up and saw the unmasked face of Maury Taller looming over him, with the dark outside skin of the ship beyond him.

"How're you feeling, Joe?" Maury asked.

"All right," he answered. Suddenly he lifted his head in fright. "My leg — I can't feel my leg!" Then he saw the silver anesthetic band that was clamped about his right leg, high on the thigh. He sank back with a sigh.

Maury said, "You'll be all right, Joe."

The words seemed to trip a trigger in his mind. Suddenly the implications of his damaged leg burst on him. He was the Leader!

"Help me!" he gritted, trying to sit up.

"You ought to lie still."

"Help me up, I said!" The leg was a dead weight. Maury's hands took hold and helped raise his body. He got the leg swung off the edge of the surface on which he had been lying, and got into sitting position. He looked around him.

The magnetic bubble had been set up to make a small, air-filled addition of breathable ship's atmosphere around the airlock entrance of the *Harrier*. It enclosed about as much space as a good-sized living room. Its floor was the mountain hillside's rock and gravel. A mattress from one of the ship's bunks had been set up on equipment boxes to make him a bed. At the other end of the bubble-enclosed space something as big as a man was lying zippered up in a gray cargo freeze-sack.

"What's that?" Joe demanded. "Where's everybody?"

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"They're checking equipment in the damaged sections," answered Maury. "We shot you full of medical juices. You've been out about twenty hours. That's about three-quarters of a local day-and-night cycle locally, here." He grabbed the wounded man's shoulders suddenly with both hands. "Hold it! What're you trying to do?"

"Have a look in that freeze-sack there," grunted the Team Leader between his teeth. "Let go of me, Maury. I'm still in charge here!"

"Sit still," said Maury. "I'll bring it to you."

He went over to the bag, taking hold of one of the carrying handles he dragged it back. It came easily in the lesser gravity, only a little more than eight-tenths of Earth's. He hauled the thing to the bed and unzipped it.

Joe stared. What was inside was not what he had been expecting.

"Cute, isn't it?" said Maury.

They looked down at the hard-frozen gray body of a biped, with the back of its skull shattered and burnt by the flare of a signal pistol. It lay on its back. The legs were somewhat short for the body and thick, as the arms were thick. But elbow and knee joints were where they should be, and the hands had four stubby gray fingers, each with an opposed thumb. Like the limbs, the body was thick — almost waistless. There were deep creases, as if tucks had been taken in the skin, around the body under the armpits, around the waist and around the legs and arms.

The head, though, was the startling feature. It was heavy and round as a ball, sunk into thick folds of neck and all but featureless. Two long slits ran down each side into the neck and shoulder area. The slits were tight closed. Like the rest of the body, the head had no hair. The eyes were little pockmarks, like raisins sunk into a doughball, and there were no visible brow ridges. The nose was a snout-end set almost flush with the facial surface. The mouth was lipless, a line of skin folded together, through which now glinted barely a glimpse of close-set, large, tridentated teeth.

"What's this?" said Joe. "Where's the thing that attacked us?"

"This is it," said Maury. "One of the aliens from the other ship."

Joe stared at him. In the brighter, harsher light from the star K94 overhead, he noticed for the first time a sprinkling of gray hairs in the black shock above Maury's spade-shaped face. Maury was no older than Joe himself.

"What're you talking about?" said Joe. "I saw that thing that attacked me. And this isn't it!"

"Look," said Maury and turned to the foot of the bed. From one of the equipment boxes he brought up eight by ten inch density photographs. "Here," he said, handing them to the Survey Team Leader. "The first one is set for bone density."

Joe took them. It showed the skeleton of the being at his feet . . . and it bore only a relative kinship to the shape of the being itself.

Under the flesh and skin that

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seemed so abnormally thick, the skull was high-forebrained and well developed. Heavy brown ridges showed over deep wells for the eyes. The jaw and teeth were the prognathous equipment of a carnivorous animal.

But that was only the beginning of the oddities. Bony ridges of gill structures were buried under a long fold on either side of the head, neck and shoulders. The rib cage was enormous and the pelvis tiny, buried under eight or nine inches of the gray flesh. The limbs were literally double-jointed. There was a fantastic double structure of ball and socket that seemed wholly unnecessary. Maury saw the Survey Leader staring at one hip joint and leaned over to tap it with the blunt nail of his forefinger.

"Swivel and lock," said Maury. "If the joint's pulled out, it can turn in any direction. Then, if the muscles surrounding it contract, the two ball joints interlace those bony spurs there and lock together so that they operate as a single joint in the direction chosen. That hip joint can act like the hip joint on the hind leg of a quadruped, or the leg of a biped. It can even adapt for jumping and running with maximum efficiency. — Look at the toes and the fingers."

Joe looked. Hidden under flesh, the bones of feet and hands were not stubby and short, but long and powerful. And at the end of finger and toe bones were the curved, conical claws they had seen rip open Sam Cloate with one passing blow.

"Look at these other pictures now," said Maury, taking the first one off the stack Joe held. "These have been set for densities of muscle — that's this one here — and fat. Here. And this one is set for soft internal organs — here." He was down to the last. "And this one was set for the density of the skin. Look at that. See how thick it is, and how great folds of it are literally tucked away underneath in those creases.

"Now," said Maury, "look at this closeup of a muscle. See how it resembles an interlocking arrangement of innumerable tiny muscles? Those small muscles can literally shift to adapt to different skeletal positions. They can take away beef from one area and add it to an adjoining area. Each little muscle actually holds on to its neighbors, and they have little sphincter-sealed tube-systems to hook on to whatever blood-conduit is close. By increased—hookup they can increase the blood supply to any particular muscle that's being overworked. There's parallel nerve connections."

Maury stopped and looked at the other man.

"You see?" said Maury. "This alien can literally be four or five different kinds of animal. Even a fish! And no telling how many varieties of each kind. We wondered a little at first why he wasn't wearing any kind of clothing, but we didn't wonder after we got these pictures. Why would he need clothing when he can adapt to any situation? — Joe!" said Maury. "You see it, don't you? You see the natural advantage these things have over us all?"

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Joe shook his head.

"There's no body hair," he said. "The creature that jumped me was striped like a tiger."

"Pigmentation. In response to emotion, maybe," said Maury. "For camouflage — or for terrifying the victims."

Joe sat staring at the pictures in his hand.

"All right," he said after a bit. "Then tell me how he happened to get here three or four minutes after we fell down here ourselves? And where did he come from? We rammed that other ship a good five miles up."

"There's only one way, the rest of us figured it out," said Maury. "He was one of the ones who were spilled out when we hit them. He must have grabbed our hull and ridden us down."

"That's impossible!"

"Not if he could flatten himself out and develop suckers like a starfish," said Maury. "The skin picture shows he could."

"All right," said Joe. "Then why did he try a suicidal trick like that attack — him alone against the eight of us?"

"Maybe it wasn't so suicidal," said Maury. "Maybe he didn't see Cal's pistol and thought he could take the unarmed eight of us." Maury hesitated. "Maybe he could, too. Or maybe he was just doing his duty — to do as much damage to us as he could before we got him. There's no cover around here that'd have given him a chance to escape from us. He knew that we'd see him the first time he moved."

Joe nodded, looking down at the form in the freeze-sack. For the aliens of the other ship there would be one similarity with the humans — a duty either to get home themselves with the news of contact, at all costs; or failing that, to see their enemy did not get home.

For a moment he found himself thinking of the frozen body before him almost as if it had been human. From what strange home world might this individual now be missed forever? And what thoughts had taken place in that round, gray-skinned skull as it had fallen surfaceward clinging to the ship of its enemies, seeing the certainty of its own death approaching as surely as the rocky mountainside?

"Do we have record films of the battle?" Joe asked.

"I'll get them." Maury went off.

He brought the films. Joe, feeling the weakness of his condition stealing up on him, pushed it aside and set to examining the pictorial record of the battle. Seen in the film viewer, the battle had a remote quality. The alien ship was smaller than Joe had thought, half the size of the *Harrier*. The two dropped weights had made large holes in its midships. It was not surprising that it had broken apart when rammed.

One of the halves of the broken ship had gone up and melted in a sudden flare of green light like their weapons beam, as if some internal explosion had taken place. The other half had fallen parallel to the *Harrier* and almost as slowly — as if the fragment, like the dying *Harrier*, had had yet some powers of flight

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— and had been lost to sight at last on the opposite side of this mountain, still falling.

Four gray bodies had spilled from the alien ship as it broke apart. Three, at least, had fallen some five miles to their deaths. The record camera had followed their dwindling bodies. And Maury was right; these had been changing even as they fell, flattening and spreading out as if in an instinctive effort to slow their fall. But, slowed or not, a five-mile fall even in this lesser-than-Earth gravity was death.

Joe put the films aside and began to ask Maury questions.

The *Harrier*, Maury told him, would never lift again. Half her drive section was melted down to magnesium alloy slag. She lay here with food supplies adequate for the men who were left for four months. Water was no problem as long as everyone existed still within the ship's recycling system. Oxygen was available in the local atmosphere and respirators would extract it. Storage units gave them housekeeping power for ten years. There was no shortage of medical supplies, the tool shop could fashion ordinary implements, and there was a good stock of usual equipment.

But there was no way of getting off this mountain.

II

The others had come into the bubble while Maury had been speaking. They stood now around the bed. With the single exception of Cal, who showed nothing, they all had a new, taut, skinned-down look about their faces, like men who have been recently exhausted or driven beyond their abilities.

"Look around you," said Jeff Ramsey, taking over from Maury when Maury spoke of the mountain. "Without help we can't leave here."

"Tell him," said Doug Kellas. Like young Jeff, Doug had not shaved recently. But where Jeff's stubble of beard was blond, Doug's was brown-dark and now marked out the hollows under his youthful cheekbones. The two had been the youngest of the Team.

"Well, this is a hanging valley" said Jeff. Jeff was the surface man geologist and meteorologist of the Team. "At one time a glacier used to come down this valley we're lying in, and over that edge there. Then the valley subsided, or the mountain rose or the climate changed. All the slopes below that cliff edge — any way down from here — brings you finally to a sheer cliff."

"How could the land raise that much?" murmured Maury, looking out and down at the green too far below to tell what it represented. Jeff shrugged.

"This is a bigger world than Earth — even if it's lighter," he said. "Possibly more liable to crustal distortion." He nodded at the peaks above them. "These are young mountains. Their height alone reflects the lesser gravity. That glacier up there couldn't have formed on that steep a slope on Earth."

"There's the Messenger," said Cal.

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His deeper-toned voice brought them all around. He had been standing behind the rest, looking over their heads. He smiled a little dryly and sadly at the faint unanimous look of hostility on the faces of all but the Survey Leader's. He was unusual in the respect that he was so built as not to need their friendship. But he was a member of the Team as they were and he would have liked to have had that friendship — if it could have been had at any price short of changing his own naturally individualistic character.

"There's no hope of that," said Doug Kellas. "The Messenger was designed for launching from the ship in space. Even in spite of the lower gravity here, it'd never break loose of the planet."

The Messenger was an emergency device every ship carried. It was essentially a miniature ship in itself, with drive unit and controls for one shift through no-time and an attached propulsive unit to kick it well clear of any gravitic field that might inhibit the shift into no-time. It could be set with the location of a ship wishing to send a message back to Earth, and with the location of Earth at the moment of arrival — both figured in terms of angle and distance from the theoretical center-point of the galaxy, as determined by ship's observations. It would set off, translate itself through no-time in one jump back to a reception area just outside Earth's critical gravitic field, and there be picked up with the message it contained.

For the *Harrier* team, this message could tell of the aliens and call for rescue. All that was needed was the precise information concerning the *Harrier's* location in relation to Galactic Centerpoint and Earth's location.

In the present instance, this was no problem. The ship's computer log developed the known position and movement of Earth with regard to Centerpoint, with every shift and movement of the ship. And the position of the second planet of star K94 was known to the chartmakers of Earth recorded by last observation aboard the *Harrier*.

Travel in no-time made no difficulty of distance. In no-time all points coincided, and the ship was theoretically touching them all. Distance was not important, but location was. And a precise location was impossible — the very time taken to calculate it would be enough to render it impossibly inaccurate. What ships travelling by no-time operated on were calculations approximately as correct as possible — *and leave a safety factor*, read the rulebook.

Calculate not to the destination, but to a point safely short enough of it, so that the predictable error will not bring the ship out in the center of some solid body. Calculate safely short of the distance remaining . . . and so on by smaller and smaller jumps to a safe conclusion.

But that was with men aboard. With a mechanical unit like the Messenger, a one-jump risk could be taken.

The *Harrier* had the figures to risk it — but a no-time drive could

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not operate within the critical area of a gravitic field like this planet's. And, as Jeff had said, the propulsive unit of the Messenger was not powerful enough to take off from this mountainside and fight its way to escape from the planet.

"That was one of the first things I figured," said Jeff, now. "We're more than four miles above this world's sea-level, but it isn't enough. There's too much atmosphere still above us."

"The Messenger's only two and a half feet long put together," said Maury. "It only weighs fifteen pounds earthside. Can't we send it up on a balloon or something? Did you think of that?"

"Yes," said Jeff. "We can't calculate exactly the time it would take for a balloon to drift to a firing altitude, and we have to know the time to set the destination controls. We can't improvise any sort of a booster propulsion unit for fear of jarring or affecting the destination controls. The Messenger is meant to be handled carefully and used in just the way it's designed to be used, and that's all." He looked around at them. "Remember, the first rule of a Survey Ship is that it never lands anywhere but Earth."

"Still," said Cal, who had been calmly waiting while they talked this out, "we can make the Messenger work."

"How?" challenged Doug, turning on him. "Just how?"

Cal turned and pointed to the wind-piping battlemented peaks of the mountain looming far above.

"I did some calculating myself," he said. "If we climb up there and send the Messenger off from the top, it'll break free and go."

None of the rest of them said anything for a moment. They had all turned and were looking up the steep slope of the mountain, at the cliffs, the glacier where no glacier should be able to hang, and the peaks.

"Any of you had any mountain-climbing experience?" asked Joe.

"There was a rock-climbing club at the University I went to," said Cal. "They used to practice on the rock walls of the bluffs on the St. Croix River — that's about sixty miles west of Minneapolis and St. Paul. I went out with them a few times."

No one else said anything. Now they were looking at Cal.

"And," said Joe, "as our nearest thing to an expert, you think that —" he nodded to the mountain — "can be climbed carrying the Messenger along?"

Cal nodded.

"Yes," he said slowly. "I think it can. I'll carry the Messenger myself. We'll have to make ourselves some equipment in the tool shop, here at the ship. And I'll need help going up the mountain."

"How many?" said Joe.

"Three." Cal looked around at them as he called their names. "Maury, Jeff and Doug. All the able-bodied we've got."

Joe was growing paler with the effort of the conversation.

"What about John?" he asked looking past Doug at John Martin,

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Number Nine of the Survey Team. John was a short, rugged man with wiry hair — but right now his face was almost as pale as Joe's, and his warmsuit bulged over the chest.

"John got slashed up when he tried to pull the alien off you," said Cal calmly. "Just before I shot. He got it clear across the pectoral muscles at the top of his chest. He's no use to me."

"I'm all right," whispered John. It hurt him even to breathe and he winced in spite of himself at the effort of talking.

"Not all right to climb a mountain," said Cal. "I'll take Maury, Jeff and Doug."

"All right. Get at it then." Joe made a little, awkward gesture with his hand, and Maury stooped to help pull the pillows from behind him and help him lie down. "All of you — get on with it."

"Come with me," said Cal. "I'll show you what we're going to have to build ourselves in the tool shop."

"I'll be right with you," said Maury. The others went off. Maury stood looking down at Joe. They had been friends and teammates for some years.

"Shoot," whispered Joe weakly, staring up at him. "Get it off your chest, whatever it is, Maury." The effort of the last few minutes was beginning to tell on Joe. It seemed to him the bed rocked with a seasick motion beneath him, and he longed for sleep.

"You want Cal to be in charge?" said Maury, staring down at him.

Joe lifted his head from the pillow. He blinked and made an effort and the bed stopped moving for a moment under him.

"You don't think Cal should be?" he said.

Maury simply looked down at him without words. When men work and sometimes die together as happens with tight units like a Survey Team, there is generally a closeness amongst them. This closeness, or the lack of it, is something that is not easily talked about by the men concerned.

"All right," Joe said. "Here's my reasons for putting him in charge of this. In the first place he's the only one who's done any climbing. Secondly, I think the job is one he deserves." Joe looked squarely back up at the man who was his best friend on the Team. "Maury, you and the rest don't understand Cal. I do. I know that country he was brought up in and I've had access to his personal record. You all blame him for something he can't help."

"He's never made any attempt to fit in with the Team —"

"He's not built to fit himself into things. Maury —" Joe struggled up on one elbow. "He's built to make things fit him. Listen, Maury — he's bright enough, isn't he?"

"I'll give him that," said Maury, grudgingly.

"All right," said Joe. "Now listen. I'm going to violate Department rules and tell you a little bit about what made him what he is. Did you know Cal never saw the inside of a formal school until he was sixteen — and then the school

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was a university? The uncle and aunt who brought him up in the old voyageur's-trail area of the Minnesota-Canadian border were just brilliant enough and nutty enough to get Cal certified for home education. The result was Cal grew up in the open woods, in a tight little community that was the whole world, as far as he was concerned. And that world was completely indestructible, reasonable and handlable by young Cal Hartlett."

"But —"

"Let me talk, Maury. I'm going to this much trouble," said Joe, with effort, "to convince you of something important. Add that background to Cal's natural intellect and you get a very unusual man. Do you happen to be able to guess what Cal's individual sense of security rates out at on the psych profile?"

"I suppose it's high," said Maury.

"It isn't simply high — it just isn't," Joe said. "He's off the scale. When he showed up at the University of Minnesota at sixteen and whizzed his way through a special ordering of entrance exams, the psychology department there wanted to put him in a cage with the rest of the experimental animals. He couldn't see it. He refused politely, took his bachelor's degree and went into Survey Studies. And here he is." Joe paused. "That's why he's going to be in charge. These aliens we've bumped into could be the one thing the human race can't match. We've got to get word home. And to get word home, we've got to get someone with the Messenger to the top of that mountain."

He stopped talking. Maury stood there.

"You understand me, Maury?" said Joe. "I'm Survey Leader. It's my responsibility. And in my opinion if there's one man who can get the Messenger to the top of the mountain, it's Cal."

The bed seemed to make a slow half-swing under him suddenly. He lost his balance. He toppled back off the support of his elbow, and the sky overhead beyond the bubble began to rotate slowly around him and things blurred.

Desperately he fought to hold on to consciousness. He had to convince Maury, he thought. If he could convince Maury, the others would fall in line. He knew what was wrong with them in their feelings toward Cal as a leader. It was the fact that the mountain was unclimbable. Anyone could see it was unclimbable. But Cal was going to climb it anyway, they all knew that, and in climbing it he would probably require the lives of the men who went with him.

They would not have minded that if he had been one of them. But he had always stood apart, and it was a cold way to give your life — for a man whom you had never understood, or been able to get close to.

"Maury," he choked. "Try to see it from Cal's — try to see it from his —"

The sky spun into a blur. The world blurred and tilted.

"Orders," Joe croaked at Maury. "Cal — command —"

"Yes," said Maury, pressing him back down on the bed as he tried

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blindly to sit up again. "All right. All right, Joe. Lie still. He'll have the command. He'll be in charge and we'll all follow him. I promise..."

IV

During the next two days, the Survey Leader was only intermittently conscious. His fever ran to dangerous levels, and several times he trembled and jerked as if on the verge of going into convulsions. John Martin also, although he was conscious and able to move around and even do simple tasks, was pale, high-fevered and occasionally thick-tongued for no apparent reason. It seemed possible there was an infective agent in the claw and teeth wounds made by the alien, with which the ship's medicines were having trouble coping.

With the morning of the third day when the climbers were about to set out both men showed improvement.

The Survey Leader came suddenly back to clear-headedness as Cal and the three others were standing, all equipped in the bubble, ready to leave. They had been discussing last-minute warnings and advices with a pale but alert John Martin when Joe's voice entered the conversation.

"What?" it said. "Who's alive? What was that?"

They turned and saw him propped up on one elbow on his makeshift bed. They had left him on it since the sleeping quarters section of the ship had been completely destroyed, and the sections left unharmed were too full of equipment to make practical places for the care of a wounded man. Now they saw his eyes taking in their respirator masks, packs, hammers, the homemade pitons and hammers, and other equipment including rope, slung about them.

"What did one of you say?" Joe demanded again. "What was it?"

"Nothing, Joe," said John Martin, coming toward him. "Lie down."

Joe waved him away, frowning. "Something about one being still alive. One what?"

Cal looked down at him. Joe's face had grown lean and fallen in even in these few days but the eyes in the face were sensible.

"He should know," Cal said. His calm, hard, oddly carrying baritone quieted them all. "He's still Survey Leader." He looked around at the rest but no one challenged his decision. He turned and went into the corridor of the ship, down to the main control room, took several photo prints from a drawer and brought them back. When he got back out, he found Joe now propped up on pillows but waiting.

"Here," said Cal, handing Joe the photos. "We sent survey rockets with cameras over the ridge up there for a look at the other side of the mountain. That top picture shows you what they saw."

Joe looked down at the top picture that showed a stony mountainside steeper than the one the *Harrier* lay on. On this rocky slope was what looked like the jagged, broken-off end of a blackened oil drum —

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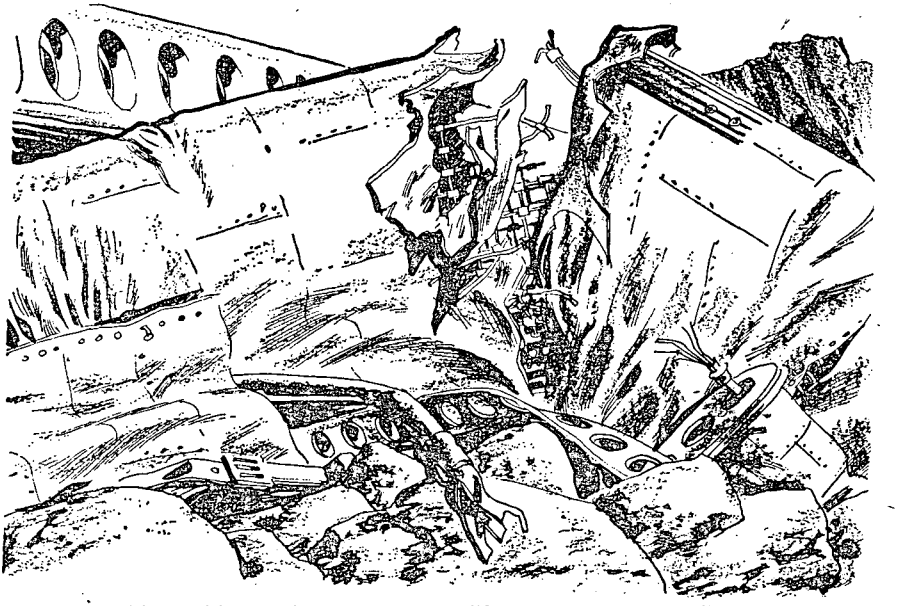

with something white spilled out on the rock by the open end of the drum.

"That's what's left of the alien ship," said Cal. "Look at the closeup on the next picture."

Joe discarded the top photo and looked at the one beneath. Enlarged in the second picture he saw that the white something was the body of an alien, lying sprawled out and stiff.

"He's dead, all right," said Cal. "He's been dead a day or two anyway. But take a good look at the whole scene and tell me how it strikes you."

Joe stared at the photo with concentration. For a long moment he said nothing. Then he shook his head, slowly.

"Something's phony," he said at last, huskily.

"I think so too," said Cal. He sat down on the makeshift bed beside Joe and his weight tilted the wounded man a little toward him. He pointed to the dead alien. "Look at him. He's got nothing in the way of a piece of equipment he was trying to put outside the ship before he died. And that mountainside's as bare as ours. There was no place for him to go outside the ship that made any sense as a destination if he was that close to dying. And if you're dying on a strange world, do you crawl *out* of the one familiar place that's there with you?"

"Not if you're human," said Doug Kellas behind Cal's shoulder. There was the faintly hostile note in Doug's voice still. "There could be

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a dozen different reasons we don't know anything about. Maybe it's taboo with them to die inside a spaceship. Maybe he was having hallucinations at the end, that home was just beyond the open end of the ship. Anything."

Cal did not bother to turn around.

"It's possible you're right, Doug," he said. "They're about our size physically and their ship was less than half the size of the *Harrier*. Counting this one in the picture and the three that fell with the one that we killed here, accounts for five of them. But just suppose there were six. And the sixth one hauled the body of this one outside in case we came around for a look — just to give us a false sense of security thinking they were all gone."

Joe nodded slowly. He put the photos down on the bed and looked at Cal who stood up.

"You're carrying guns?" said Joe. "You're all armed in case?"

"We're starting out with sidearms," said Cal. "Down here the weight of them doesn't mean much. But up there . . ." He nodded to the top reaches of the mountain and did not finish. "But you and John better move inside the ship nights and keep your eyes open in the day."

"We will." Joe reached up a hand and Cal shook it. Joe shook hands with the other three who were going. They put their masks on.

"The rest of you ready?" asked Cal, who by this time was already across the bubble enclosure, ready to step out. His voice came hollowly through his mask. The others broke away from Joe and went to-

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ward Cal, who stepped through the bubble.

"Wait!" said Joe suddenly from the bed. They turned to him. He lay propped up, and his lips moved for a second as if he was hunting for words. "— Good luck!" he said at last.

"Thanks." said Cal for all of them. "To you and John, too. We'll all need it."

He raised a hand in farewell. They turned and went.

They went away from the ship, up the steep slope of the old glacier stream bed that became more steep as they climbed. Cal was in the lead with Maury, then Jeff, then Doug bringing up the rear. The yellow bright rays of K94 struck back at them from the ice-scoured granite surface of the slope, gray with white veinings of quartz. The warmsuits were designed to cool as well as heat their wearers, but they had been designed for observer-wearers, not working wearers. At the bend-spots of arm and leg joints, the soft interior cloth of the warmsuits soon became damp with sweat as the four men toiled upward. And the cooling cycle inside the suits made these damp spots clammy-feeling when they touched the wearer. The respirator masks also became slippery with perspiration where the soft, elastic rims of their transparent faceplates pressed against brow and cheek and chin. And to the equipment-heavy men the *feel* of the angle of the steep rock slope seemed treacherously less than eyes trained to Earth gravity reported it. Like a subtly tilted floor in a fun house at an amusement park.

They climbed upward in silence as the star that was larger than the sun of Earth climbed in the sky at their backs. They moved almost mechanically, wrapped in their own thoughts. What the other three thought were personal, private thoughts having no bearing on the moment. But Cal in the lead, his strong-boned, rectangular face expressionless, was wrapped up in two calculations. Neither of these had anything to do with the angle of the slope or the distance to the top of the mountain.

He was calculating what strains the human material walking behind him would be able to take. He would need more than their grudging co-operation. And there was something else.

He was thinking about water.

Most of the load carried by each man was taken up with items constructed to be almost miraculously light and compact for the job they would do. One exception was the fifteen Earth pounds of components of the Messenger, which Cal himself carried in addition to his mountain-climbing equipment — the homemade crampons, pitons and ice axe-piton hammer — and his food and the sonic pistol at his belt. Three others were the two-gallon containers of water carried by each of the other three men. Compact rations of solid food they all carried, and in a pinch they could go hungry. But to get to the top

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of the mountain they would need water.

Above them were ice slopes, and the hook-shaped glacier that they had been able to see from the ship below.

That the ice could be melted to make drinking water was beyond question. Whether that water would be safe to drink was something else. There had been the case of another Survey ship on another world whose melted local ice water had turned out to contain as a deposited impurity a small wind-born organism that came to life in the inner warmth of men's bodies and attacked the walls of their digestive tracts. To play safe here, the glacier ice would have to be distilled.

Again, one of the pieces of compact equipment Cal himself carried was a miniature still. But would he still have it by the time they reached the glacier? They were all ridiculously overloaded now.

Of that overload, only the Messenger itself and the climbing equipment, mask and warmsuit had to be held on to at all costs. The rest could and probably would go. They would probably have to take a chance on the melted glacier ice. If the chance went against them — how much water would be needed to go the rest of the way?

Two men at least would have to be supplied. Only two men helping each other could make it all the way to the top. A single climber would have no chance.

Cal calculated in his head and climbed. They all climbed.

From below, the descending valley stream bed of the former glacier had looked like not too much of a climb. Now that they were on it, they were beginning to appreciate the tricks the eye could have played upon it by sloping distances in a lesser gravity, where everything was constructed to a titanic scale. They were like ants inching up the final stories of the Empire State Building.

Every hour they stopped and rested for ten minutes. And it was nearly seven hours later, with K94 just approaching its noon above them, that they came at last to the narrowed end of the ice-smoothed rock, and saw, only a few hundred yards ahead, the splintered and niched vertical rock wall they would have to climb to the foot of the hook-shaped glacier.

V

They stopped to rest before tackling the distance between them and the foot of the rock wall. They sat in a line on the bare rock, facing downslope, their packloads leaned back against the higher rock. Cal heard the sound of the others breathing heavily in their masks, and the voice of Maury came somewhat hollowly through the diaphragm of his mask.

"Lots of loose rock between us and that cliff," said the older man. "What do you suppose put it there?"

"It's talus," answered Jeff Ramsey's mask-hollowed voice from the far end of the line. "Weathering — heat differences, or maybe even ice from snowstorms during the winter

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season getting in cracks of that rock face, expanding, and cracking off the sedimentary rock it's constructed of. All that weathering's made the wall full of wide cracks and pockmarks, see?"

Cal glanced over his shoulder.

"Make it easy to climb," he said. And heard the flat sound of his voice thrown back at him inside his mask. "Let's get going. Everybody up!"

They got creakily and protestingly to their feet. Turning, they fell into line and began to follow Cal into the rock debris, which thickened quickly until almost immediately they were walking upon loose rock flakes any size up to that of a garage door, that slipped or slid unexpectedly under their weight and the angle of this slope that would not have permitted such an accumulation under Earth's greater gravity.

"Watch it!" Cal threw back over his shoulder at the others. He had nearly gone down twice when loose rock under his weight threatened to start a miniature avalanche among the surrounding rock. He labored on up the talus slope, hearing the men behind swearing and sliding as they followed.

"Spread out!" he called back. "So you aren't one behind the other — and stay away from the bigger rocks."

These last were a temptation. Often as big as a small platform, they looked like rafts floating on top of the smaller shards of rock, the similarity heightened by the fact that the rock of the cliff-face was evidently planar in structure. Nearly all the rock fragments split off had flat faces. The larger rocks seemed to offer a temptingly clear surface on which to get away from the sliding depth of smaller pieces in which the boots of the men's warmsuits went mid-leg deep with each sliding step. But the big fragments, Cal had already discovered, were generally in precarious balance on the loose rock below them and the angled slope. The lightest step upon them was often enough to make them turn and slide.

He had hardly called the warning before there was a choked-off yell from behind him and the sound of more-than-ordinary roaring and sliding of rock.

He spun around. With the masked figures of Maury on his left and Doug on his right he went scrambling back toward Jeff Ramsey, who was lying on his back, half-buried in rock fragments and all but underneath a ten by six foot slab of rock that now projected reeflike from the smaller rock pieces around it.

Jeff did not stir as they came up to him, though he seemed conscious. Cal was first to reach him. He bent over the blond-topped young man and saw through the face plate of the respirator mask how Jeff's lips were sucked in at the corners and the skin showed white in a circle around his tight mouth.

"My leg's caught." The words came tightly and hollowly through the diaphragm of Jeff's mask. "I think something's wrong with it."

Carefully, Cal and the others dug

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the smaller rock away. Jeff's right leg was pinned down under an edge of the big rock slab. By extracting the rock underneath it piece by piece, they got the leg loose. But it was bent in a way it should not have been.

"Can you move it?"

Jeff's face stiffened and beaded with sweat behind the mask faceplate.

"No."

"It's broken, all right," said Maury. "One down already," he added bitterly. He had already gone to work, making a splint from two tent poles out of Jeff's pack. He looked up at Cal as he worked, squatting beside Jeff. "What do we do now, Cal? We'll have to carry him back down?"

"No," said Cal. He rose to his feet. Shading his eyes against the sun overhead he looked down the hanging valley to the *Harrier*, tiny below them.

They had already used up nearly an hour floundering over the loose rock, where one step foreward often literally had meant two steps sliding backward. His timetable, based on his water supplies, called for them to be at the foot of the ice slope leading to the hook glacier before camping for the night — and it was already noon of the long local day.

"Jeff," he said. "You're going to have to get back down to the *Harrier* by yourself." Maury started to protest, then shut up. Cal could see the other men looking at him.

Jeff nodded. "All right," he said. "I can make it. I can roll most of the way." He managed a grin.

"How's the leg feel?"

"Not bad, Cal." Jeff reached out a warmsuited hand and felt the leg gingerly. "More numb than anything right now."

"Take his load off," said Cal to Doug "And give him your morphine pack as well as his own. We'll pad that leg and wrap it the best we can, Jeff, but it's going to be giving you a rough time before you get it back to the ship."

"I could go with him to the edge of the loose rock —" began Doug, harshly.

"No. I don't need you. Downhill's going to be easy," said Jeff.

"That's right," said Cal. "But even if he did need you, you couldn't go, Doug. *I* need you to get to the top of that mountain."

They finished wrapping and padding the broken leg with one of the pup tents and Jeff started off, half-sliding, half dragging himself downslope through the loose rock fragments.

They watched him for a second. Then, at Cal's order, they turned heavily back to covering the weary, strugglesome distance that still separated them from the foot of the rock face.

They reached it at last and passed into the shadow at its base. In the sunlight of the open slope the warmsuits had struggled to cool them. In the shadow, abruptly, the process went the other way. The cliff of the rock face was about two hundred feet in height, leading up to that same ridge over which the weather balloon had been sent to

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take pictures of the fragment of alien ship on the other side of the mountain. Between the steep rock walls at the end of the glacial valley, the rock face was perhaps fifty yards wide. It was torn and pocked and furrowed vertically by the splitting off of rock from it. It looked like a great chunk of plank standing on end, weathered along the lines of its vertical grain into a decayed roughness of surface.

The rock face actually leaned back a little from the vertical, but, looking up at it from its foot, it seemed not only to go straight up, but — if you looked long enough — to overhang, as if it might come down on the heads of the three men. In the shadowed depths of vertical cracks and holes, dark ice clung.

Cal turned to look back the way they had come. Angling down away behind them, the hanging valley looked like a giant's ski-jump. A small, wounded creature that was the shape of Jeff was dragging itself down the slope, and a child's toy, the shape of the *Harrier*, lay forgotten at the jump's foot.

Cal turned back to the cliff and said to the others, "Rope up."

He had already shown them how this was to be done, and they had practiced it back at the *Harrier*. They tied themselves together with the length of sounding line, the thinness of which Cal had previously padded and thickened so that a man could wrap it around himself to belay another climber without being cut in half. There was no worry about the strength of the sounding line.

"All right," said Cal, when they were tied together— himself in the lead, Maury next, Doug at the end. "Watch where I put my hands and feet as I climb. Put yours in exactly the same places."

"How'll I know when to move?" Doug asked hollowly through his mask.

"Maury'll wave you on, as I'll wave him on," said Cal. Already they were high enough up for the whistling winds up on the mountain peak to interfere with mask-impeded conversations conducted at a distance. "You'll find this cliff is easier than it looks. Remember what I told you about handling the rope. And don't look down."

"All right."

Cal had picked out a wide rock chimney rising twenty feet to a little ledge of rock. The inner wall of the chimney was studded with projections on which his hands and feet could find purchase. He began to climb.

When he reached the ledge he was pleasantly surprised to find that, in spite of his packload, the lesser gravity had allowed him to make the climb without becoming winded. Maury, he knew, would not be so fortunate. Doug, being the younger man and in better condition, should have less trouble, which was why he had put Doug at the end, so that they would have the weak man between them.

Now Cal stood up on the ledge, braced himself against the rock wall at his back and belayed the rope by passing it over his left shoulder,

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around his body and under his right arm.

He waved Maury to start climbing. The older man moved to the wall and began to pull himself up as Cal took in the slack of the rope between them.

Maury climbed slowly but well, testing each hand and foothold before he trusted his weight to it. In a little while he was beside Cal on the ledge, and the ascent of Doug began. Doug climbed more swiftly, also without incident. Shortly they were all on the ledge.

Cal had mapped out his climb on this rock face before they had left, studying the cliff with powerful glasses from the *Harrier* below. Accordingly, he now made a traverse, moving horizontally across the rock face to another of the deep, vertical clefts in the rock known as chimneys to climbers. Here he belayed the rope around a projection and, by gesture and shout, coached Maury along the route.

Maury, and then Doug, crossed without trouble.

Cal then led the way up the second chimney, wider then the first and deeper. This took them up another forty-odd feet to a ledge on which all three men could stand or sit together.

Cal was still not winded. But looking at the other two, he saw that Maury was damp-faced behind the faceplate of his mask. The older man's breath was whistling in the respirator. It was time, thought Cal, to lighten loads. He had never expected to get far with some of their equipment in any case, but he had wanted the psychological advantage of starting the others out with everything needful.

"Maury," he said, "I think we'll leave your sidearm here, and some of the other stuff you're carrying."

"I can carry it," said Maury. "I don't need special favors."

"No," said Cal. "You'll leave it. I'm the judge of what's ahead of us, and in my opinion the time to leave it's now." He helped Maury off with most of what he carried, with the exception of a pup tent, his climbing tools and the water container and field rations. Then as soon as Maury was rested, they tackled the first of the two really difficult stretches of the cliff.

This was a ten-foot traverse that any experienced climber would not have found worrisome. To amateurs like themselves it was spine-chilling.

The route to be taken was to the left and up to a large, flat piece of rock wedged in a wide crack running diagonally up the rock face almost to its top. There were plenty of available footrests and handholds along the way. What would bother them was the fact that the path they had to take was around a boss, or protuberance of rock. To get around the boss it was necessary to move out over the empty atmosphere of a clear drop to the talus slope below.

Cal went first.

He made his way slowly but carefully around the outcurve of the rock, driving in one of his homemade pitons and attaching an equal-

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ly homemade snap-ring to it, at the outermost point in the traverse. Passing the line that connected him to Maury through this, he had a means of holding the other men to the cliff if their holds should slip and they have to depend on the rope on their way around. The snap-ring and piton were also a psychological assurance.

Arrived at the rock slab in the far crack, out of sight of the other two, Cal belayed the rope and gave two tugs. A second later a tug came back. Maury had started crossing the traverse.

He was slow, very slow, about it. After agonizing minutes Cal saw Maury's hand come around the edge of the boss. Slowly he passed the projecting rock to the rock slab. His face was pale and rigid when he got to where Cal stood. His breath came in short, quick pants.

Cal signaled on the rope again. In considerably less time than Maury had taken Doug came around the boss. There was a curious look on his face.

"What is it?" asked Cal.

Doug glanced back the way he had come. "Nothing, I guess," he said. "I just thought I saw something moving back there. Just before I went around the corner. Something I couldn't make out."

Cal stepped to the edge of the rock slab and looked as far back around the boss as he could. But the ledge they had come from was out of sight. He stepped back to the ledge.

"Well," he said to the others, "the stretch is easier."

VI

It was. The crack up which they climbed now slanted to the right at an almost comfortable angle.

They went up it using hands and feet like climbing a ladder. But if it was easy, it was also long, covering better than a hundred feet of vertical rock face. At the top, where the crack pinched out, there was the second tricky traverse across the rock face, of some eight feet. Then a short climb up a cleft and they stood together on top of the ridge.

Down below, they had been hidden by the mountain walls from the high winds above. Now for the first time, as they emerged onto the ridge they faced and felt them.

The warmsuits cut out the chill of the atmosphere whistling down on them from the mountain peak, but they could feel the pressure of it molding the suits to their bodies. They stood now once more in sunlight. Behind them they could see the hanging valley and the *Harrier*. Ahead was a cwm, a hollow in the steep mountainside that they would have to cross to get to a further ridge leading up to the mountain peak. Beyond and below the further ridge, they could see the far, sloping side of the mountain and, black against it, the tiny, oil-drum-end fragment of alien ship with a dot of white just outside it.

"We'll stay roped," said Cal. He pointed across the steep-sloping hollow they would need to cross to reach the further rocky ridge. The hollow seemed merely a tilted area with occasional large rock chunks

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perched on it at angles that to Earth eyes seemed to defy gravity. But there was a high shine where the sun's rays struck.

"Is that ice?" said Maury, shading his eyes.

"Patches of it. A thin coating over the rocks," said Cal. "It's time to put on the crampons."

They sat down and attached the metal frameworks to their boots that provided them with spiked footing. They drank sparingly of the water they carried and ate some of their rations. Cal glanced at the descending sun, and the blue-black sky above them. They would have several hours yet to cross the cwm, in daylight. He gave the order to go, and led off.

He moved carefully out across the hollow, cutting or kicking footholds in patches of ice he could not avoid. The slope was like a steep roof. As they approached the deeper center of the cwm, the wind from above seemed to be funnelled at them so that it was like a hand threatening to push them into a fall.

Some of the rock chunks they passed were as large as small houses. It was possible to shelter from the wind in their lees. At the same time, they often hid the other two from Cal's sight, and this bothered him. He would have preferred to be able to watch them in their crossings of the ice patches, so that if one of them started to slide he would be prepared to belay the rope. As it was, in the constant moan and howl of the wind, his first warning would be the sudden strain on the rope itself. And if one of them fell and pulled the other off the mountainside, their double weight could drag Cal loose.

Not for the first time, Cal wished that the respirator masks they wore had been equipped with radio intercom. But these were not and there had been no equipment aboard the *Harrier* to convert them.

They were a little more than halfway across when Cal felt a tugging on the line.

He looked back. Maury was waving him up into a shelter of one of the big rocks. He waved back and turned off from the direct path, crawling up into the ice-free overhang. Behind him, as he turned, he saw Maury coming toward him, and behind Maury, Doug.

"Doug wants to tell you something!" Maury shouted against the wind noise, putting his mask up close to Cal's.

"What is it?" Cal shouted.

"— Saw it again!" came Doug's answer.

"Something moving?" Doug nodded. "Behind us?" Doug's mask rose and fell again in agreement. "Was it one of the aliens?"

"I think so!" shouted Doug. "It could be some sort of animal. It was moving awfully fast — I just got a glimpse of it!"

"Was it —" Doug shoved his masked face closer, and Cal raised his voice — "was it wearing any kind of clothing that you could see?"

"No!" Doug's head shook back and forth.

"What kind of life could climb around up here without freezing

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to death—unless it had some protection?" shouted Maury to them both.

"We don't know!" Cal answered. "Let's not take chances. If it is an alien, he's got all the natural advantages. Don't take chances. You've got your gun, Doug. Shoot anything you see moving!"

Doug grinned and looked harshly at Cal from inside his mask.

"Don't worry about me!" he shouted back. "Maury's the one without a gun."

"We'll both keep an eye on Maury! Let's get going now. There's only about another hour or so before the sun goes behind those other mountains — and we want to be in camp underneath the far ridge before dark!"

He led off again and the other two followed.

As they approached the far ridge, the wind seemed to lessen somewhat. This was what Cal had been hoping for — that the far ridge would give them some protection from the assault of the atmosphere they had been enduring in the open. The dark wall of the ridge, some twenty or thirty feet in sudden height at the edge of the cwm, was now only a hundred yards or so away. It was already in shadow from the descending sun, as were the downslope sides of the big rock chunks. Long shadows stretched toward a far precipice edge where the cwm ended, several thousand feet below. But the open icy spaces were now ruddy and brilliant with the late sunlight. Cal though wearily of the pup tents and his sleeping bag.

Without warning a frantic tugging on the rope roused him. He jerked around, and saw Maury, less than fifteen feet behind him, gesturing back the way they had come. Behind Maury, the rope to Doug led out of sight around the base of one of the rock chunks.

Then suddenly Doug slid into view.

Automatically Cal's leg muscles spasmed tight, to take the sudden jerk of the rope when Doug's falling body should draw it taut. But the jerk never came.

Sliding, falling, gaining speed as he descended the rooftop-steep slope of the cwm, Doug's body no longer had the rope attached to it. The rope still lay limp on the ground behind Maury. And then Cal saw something he had not seen before. The dark shape of Doug was not falling like a man who finds himself sliding down two thousand feet to eternity. It was making no attempt to stop its slide at all. It fell limply, loosely, like a dead man — and indeed, just at that moment, it slid far upon a small, round boulder in his path which tossed it into the air like a stuffed dummy, arms and legs asprawl, and it came down indifferently upon the slope beyond and continued, gaining speed as it went.

Cal and Maury stood watching. There was nothing else they could do. They saw the dark shape speeding on and on, until finally it was lost for good among the darker shapes of the boulders farther on down the cwm. They were left without knowing whether it came eventually to rest against some rock, or

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continued on at last to fall from the distant edge of the precipice to the green, unknown depth that was far below them.

After a little while Maury stopped looking. He turned and climbed on until he had caught up with Cal. His eyes were accusing as he pulled in the loose rope to which Doug had been attached. They looked at it together.

The rope's end had been cut as cleanly as any knife could have cut it.

The sun was just touching the further mountains. They turned without speaking and climbed on to the foot of the ridge wall.

Here the rocks were free of ice. They set up a single pup tent and crawled into it with their sleeping bags together, as the sun went down and darkness flooded their barren and howling perch on the mountainside.

VII

They took turns sitting up in their sleeping bags, in the darkness of their tiny tent, with Cal's gun ready in hand.

Lying there in the darkness, staring at the invisible tent roof nine inches above his nose, Cal recognized that in theory the aliens could simply be better than humans — and that was that. But, Cal, being the unique sort of man he was, found that he could not believe such theory.

And so, being the unique sort of man he was, he discarded it. He made a mental note to go on trying to puzzle out the alien's vulnerability tomorrow . . . and closing his eyes, fell into a light doze that was the best to be managed in the way of sleep.

When dawn began to lighten the walls of their tent they managed, with soup powder, a little of their precious water and a chemical thermal unit, to make some hot soup and get it into them. It was amazing what a difference this made, after the long, watchful and practically sleepless night. They put some of their concentrated dry rations into their stomachs on top of the soup and Cal unpacked and set up the small portable still.

He took the gun and his ice-hammer and crawled outside the tent. In the dawnlight and the tearing wind he sought ice which they could melt and then distill to replenish their containers of drinking water. But the only ice to be seen within any reasonable distance of their tent was the thin ice-glaze — *verglas*, mountaineers back on Earth called it — over which they had struggled in crossing the cwm the day before. And Cal dared not take their only gun too far from Maury, in case the alien made a sudden attack on the tent.

There was more than comradeship involved. Alone, Cal knew, there would indeed be no hope of his getting the Messenger to the mountaintop. Not even the alien could do that job alone — and so the alien's strategy must be to frustrate the human party's attempt to send a message.

It could not be doubted that the

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alien realized what their reason was for trying to climb the mountain. A race whose spaceships made use of the principle of no-time in their drives, who was equipped for war, and who responded to attack with the similarities shown so far, would not have a hard time figuring out why the human party was carrying the equipment on Cal's pack up the side of a mountain.

More, the alien, had he had a companion, would probably have been trying to get message equipment of his own up into favorable dispatching position. Lacking a companion his plan must be to frustrate the human effort. That put the humans at an additional disadvantage. They were the defenders, and could only wait for the attacker to choose the time and place of his attempt against them.

And it would not have to be too successful an attempt, at that. It would not be necessary to kill either Cal or Maury, now that Doug was gone. To cripple one of them enough so that he could not climb and help his companion climb, would be enough. In fact, if one of them were crippled Cal doubted even that they could make it back to the *Harrier*. The alien then could pick them off at leisure.

Engrossed in his thoughts, half-deafened by the ceaseless wind, Cal woke suddenly to the vibration of something thundering down on him.

He jerked his head to stare up slope — and scrambled for his life. It was like a dream, with everything in slow motion — and one large chunk of rock with its small host of lesser rocks roaring down upon him.

Then — somehow — he was clear. The miniature avalanche went crashing by him, growing to a steady roar as it grew in size sweeping down alongside the ridge. Cal found himself at the tent, from which Maury was half-emerged, on hands and knees, staring down at the avalanche.

Cal swore at himself. It was something he had been told, and had forgotten. Such places as they had camped in last night were natural funnels for avalanches of loose rock. So, he remembered now, were wide cracks like the sloping one in the cliff face they had climbed up yesterday — as, indeed, the cwm itself was on a large scale. And they had crossed the cwm in late afternoon, when the heat of the day would have been most likely to loosen the frost that held precariously balanced rocks in place.

Only fool luck had gotten them this far!

"Load up!" he shouted to Maury. "We've got to get out of here."

Maury had already seen that for himself. They left the pup-tent standing. The tent in Cal's load would do. With that the Messenger, their climbing equipment, their sleeping bags and their food and water, they began to climb the steeply sloping wall of the ridge below which they had camped. Before they were halfway up it, another large rock with its attendant avalanche of lesser rocks came by below them.

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Whether the avalanches were alien-started, or the result of natural causes, made no difference now. They had learned their lesson the hard way. From now on, Cal vowed silently, they would stick to the bare and open ridges unless there was absolutely no alternative to entering avalanche territory. And only after every precaution.

In the beginning Cal had kept a fairly regular check on how Maury was doing behind him. But as the sun rose in the bluish-black of the high altitude sky overhead the weariness of his body seemed to creep into his mind and dull it. He still turned his head at regular intervals to see how Maury was doing. But sometimes he found himself sitting and staring at his companion without any real comprehension of why he should be watching over him.

The blazing furnace of K94 overhead, climbing toward its noontime zenith, contributed to this dullness of the mind. So did the ceaseless roaring of the wind which had long since deafened them beyond any attempt at speech. As the star overhead got higher in the sky this and the wind noise combined to produce something close to hallucinations . . . so that once he looked back and for a moment seemed to see the alien following them, not astraddle the ridge and hunching themselves forward as they were, but walking along the knife-edge of rock like a monkey along a branch, foot over foot, and grasping the rock with toes like fingers, oblivious of the wind and the sun.

Cal blinked and, the illusion — if that was what it was — was gone. But its image lingered in his brain with the glare of the sun and the roar of the wind.

His eyes had fallen into the habit of focusing on the rock only a dozen feet ahead of him. At last he lifted them and saw the ridge broaden, a black shadow lying sharply across it. They had come to the rock walls below the hanging glacier they had named the Hook.

They stopped to rest in the relative wind-break shelter of the first wall, then went on.

Considering the easiness of the climb they made remarkably slow progress. Cal slowly puzzled over this until, like the slow brightening of a candle, the idea grew in him to check the absolute altimeter at his belt.

They were now nearly seven thousand feet higher up than they had been at the wreck of the *Harrier*. The mask respirators had been set to extract oxygen for them from the local atmosphere in accordance with the *Harrier* altitude. Pausing on a ledge, Cal adjusted his mask controls.

For a minute there seemed to be no difference at all. And then he began to come awake. His head cleared. He became sharply conscious, suddenly of where he stood — on a ledge of rock, surrounded by rock walls with, high overhead, the blue-black sky and brilliant sunlight on the higher walls. They were nearly at the foot of the third, and upper, battlement of the rock walls.

He looked over the edge at

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Maury, intending to signal the man to adjust his mask controls. Maury was not even looking up, a squat, lumpish figure in the warmsuit totally covered, with the black snout of the mask over his face. Cal tugged at the rope and the figure raised its face. Cal with his gloved hands made adjusting motions at the side of his mask. But the other's face below, hidden in the shadow of the faceplate, stared up without apparent comprehension. Cal started to yell down to him — here the wind noise was lessened to the point where a voice might have carried — and then thought better of it.

Instead he tugged on the rope in the signal they had repeated an endless number of times; and the figure below, foreshortened to smallness stood dully for a moment and then began to climb. His eyes sharpened by the fresh increase in the oxygen flow provided by his mask Cal watched that slow climb almost with amazement carefully taking in the rope and belaying it as the other approached.

There was a heaviness an awkwardness, about the warmsuited limbs, as slowly — but strongly enough — they pulled the climber up toward Cal. There was something abnormal about their movement. As the other drew closer, Cal stared more and more closely until at last the gloves of the climber fastened over the edge of the ledge.

Cal bent to help him. But, head down not looking, the other hoisted himself up alongside Cal and a little turned away.

Then in that last instant the combined flood of instinct and a lifetime of knowledge cried certainty. And Cal knew.

The warmsuited figure beside him was Maury no longer.

VIII

Reflexes have been the saving of many a man's life. In this case, Cal had been all set to turn and climb again, the moment Maury stood beside him on the edge. Now recognizing that somewhere among these rocks, in the past fumbing hours of oxygen starvation, Maury had ceased to live and his place had been taken by the pursuing alien, Cal's reflexes took over.

If the alien had attacked the moment he stood upright on the ledge, different reflexes would have locked Cal in physical combat with the enemy. When the alien did not attack, Cal turned instinctively to the second prepared response of his body and began automatically to climb to the next ledge.

There was no doubt that any other action by Cal, any hesitation, any curiosity about his companion would have forced the alien into an immediate attack. For then there would have been no reason not to attack. As he climbed, Cal felt his human brain beginning to work again after the hours of dullness. He had time to think.

His first thought was to cut the line that bound them together, leaving the alien below. But this would precipitate the attack Cal had al-

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ready instinctively avoided. Any place Cal could climb at all, the alien could undoubtedly climb with ease. Cal's mind chose and discarded possibilities. Suddenly he remembered the gun that hung innocently at his hip.

With that recollection, the situation began to clear and settle in his mind. The gun evened things. The knowledge that it was the alien on the other end of the rope, along with the gun, more than evened things. Armed and prepared, he could afford to risk the present situation for a while. He could play a game of pretense as well as the alien could, he thought.

That amazing emotional center of gravity, Cal's personal sense of security and adequacy that had so startled the psychology department at the university was once more in command of the situation. Cal felt the impact of the question — why was the alien pretending to be Maury? Why had he adapted himself to man-shape put on man's clothes and fastened himself to the other end of Cal's climbing rope?

Perhaps the alien desired to study the last human that opposed him before he tried to destroy it. Perhaps he had some hope of rescue by his own people, and wanted all the knowledge for them he could get. If so it was a wish that cut two ways. Cal would not be sorry of the chance to study a living alien in action.

And when the showdown came — there was the gun at Cal's belt to offset the alien's awesome physical natural advantage.

They continued to climb. Cal watched the other figure below him. What he saw was not reassuring.

With each wall climbed, the illusion of humanity grew stronger. The clumsiness Cal had noticed at first — the appearance of heaviness — began to disappear. It began to take on a smoothness and a strength that Maury had never shown in the climbing. It began in fact, to look almost familiar. Now Cal could see manlike hunching and bulgings of the shoulder muscles under the warmsuit's shapelessness, as the alien climbed and a certain trick of throwing the head from right to left to keep a constant watch for a better route up the face of the rock wall.

It was what he did himself, Cal realized suddenly. The alien was watching Cal climb ahead of him and imitating even the smallest mannerisms of the human.

They were almost to the top of the battlements, climbing more and more in sunlight. K94 was already far down the slope of afternoon. Cal began to hear an increase in the wind noise as they drew close to the open area above. Up there was the tumbled rock-strewn ground of a terminal moraine and then the snow-slope to the hook glacier.

Cal had planned to camp for the night above the moraine at the edge of the snow slope. Darkness was now only about an hour away and with darkness the showdown must come between himself and the alien. With the gun, Cal felt a fair amount of confidence. With the showdown,

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he would probably discover the reason for the alien's impersonation of Maury.

Now Cal pulled himself up the last few feet. At the top of the final wall of the battlements the wind-blast was strong. Cal found himself wondering if the alien recognized the gun as a killing tool. The alien which had attacked them outside the *Harrier* had owned neither weapons nor clothing. Neither had the ones filmed as they fell from the enemy ship, or the one lying dead outside the fragment of that ship on the other side of the mountain. It might be that they were so used to their natural strength and adaptability they did not understand the use of portable weapons. Cal let his hand actually brush against the butt of the sidearm as the alien climbed on to the top of the wall and stood erect, faceplate turned a little from Cal.

But the alien did not attack.

Cal stared at the other for a long second, before turning and starting to lead the way through the terminal moraine, the rope still binding them together. The alien moved a little behind him, but enough to his left so that he was within Cal's range of vision, and Cal was wholly within his. Threading his way among the rock rubble of the moraine, Cal cast a glance at the yellow orb of K94, now just hovering above the sharp peaks of neighboring mountains around them.

Night was close. The thought of spending the hours of darkness with the other roped to him cooled the back of Cal's neck. Was it darkness the alien was waiting for?

Above them, as they crossed the moraine the setting sun struck blazing brilliance from the glacier and the snow slope. In a few more minutes Cal would have to stop to set up the pup-tent, if he hoped to have enough light to do so. For a moment the wild crazy hope of a notion crossed Cal's mind that the alien had belatedly chosen life over duty. That at this late hour, he had changed his mind and was trying to make friends.

Cold logic washed the fantasy from Cal's mind. This being trugging almost shoulder to shoulder with him was the same creature that had sent Doug's limp and helpless body skidding and falling down the long ice-slope to the edge of an abyss. This companion alongside was the creature that had stalked Maury somewhere among the rocks of the mountainside and disposed of him, and stripped his clothing off and taken his place.

Moreover, this other was of the same race and kind as the alien who had clung to the hull of the falling *Harrier* and, instead of trying to save himself and get away on landing, had made a suicidal attack on the eight human survivors. The last thing that alien had done, when there was nothing else to be done was to try to take as many humans as possible into death with him.

This member of the same race walking side by side with Cal would certainly do no less.

But why was he waiting so long to do it? Cal frowned hard inside his mask. That question had to be answered. Abruptly he stopped.

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They were through the big rubble of the moraine, onto a stretch of gravel and small rock. The sun was already partly out of sight behind the mountain peaks. Cal untied the rope and began to unload the pup tent.

Out of the corner of his eyes, he could see the alien imitating his actions. Together they got the tent set up and their sleeping-bags inside. Cal crawled in the tiny tent and took off his boots. He felt the skin between his shoulder blades crawl as a second later the masked head of his companion poked itself through the tent opening and the other crept on hands and knees to the other sleeping bag. In the dimness of the tent with the last rays of K94 showing thinly through its walls, the shadow on the far tent wall was a monstrous parody of a man taking off his boots.

The sunlight failed and darkness filled the tent. The wind moaned loudly outside. Cal lay tense, his left hand gripping the gun he had withdrawn from its holster. But there was no movement.

The other had gotten into Maury's sleeping bag and lay with his back to Cal. Facing that back, Cal slowly brought the gun to bear. The only safe thing to do was to shoot the alien now, before sleep put Cal completely at the other's mercy.

Then the muzzle of the gun in Cal's hand sank until it pointed to the fabric of the tent floor. To shoot was the only safe thing — and it was also the only impossible thing.

Ahead of them was the snow-field and the glacier, with its undoubted

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crevasses and traps hidden under untrustworthy caps of snow. Ahead of them was the final rock climb to the summit. From the beginning, Cal had known no one man could make this final stretch alone. Only two climbers roped together could hope to make it safely to the top.

Sudden understanding burst on Cal's mind. He quietly reholstered the gun. Then, muttering to himself, he sat up suddenly without any attempt to hide the action, drew a storage cell amp from his pack and lit it. In the sudden illumination that burst on the tent he found his boots and stowed them up alongside his bag.

He shut the light off and lay down again, feeling cool and clear-headed. He had had only a glimpse in turning, but the glimpse was enough. The alien had shoved Maury's pack up into a far corner of the tent as far away from Cal as possible. But the main pockets of that pack now bulked and swelled as they had not since Cal had made Maury lighten his load on the first rock climb.

Cal lay still in the darkness with a grim feeing of humor inside him. Silently, in his own mind he took his hat off to his enemy. From the beginning he had assumed that the only possible aim one of the other race could have would be to frustrate the human attempt to get word back to the human base — so that neither race would know of the two ships' encounter.

Cal had underestimated the other. And he should not have, for technologically they were so similar and equal. The aliens had used a no-time drive. Clearly, they had also had a no-time rescue signalling device like the Messenger, which needed to be operated from the mountaintop.

The alien had planned from the beginning to join the human effort to get up into Messenger-firing position, so as to get his own device up there.

He too, had realized — in spite of his awesome natural advantage over the humans — that no single individual could make the last stage of the climb alone. Two, roped together, would have a chance. He needed Cal a much as Cal needed him.

In the darkness, Cal almost laughed out loud with the irony of it. He need not be afraid of sleeping. The showdown would come only at the top of the mountain.

Cal patted the butt of the gun at his side and smiling, he fell aseep.

But he did not smile, the next morning when, on waking, he found the holster empty.

IX

When he awoke to sunlight through the tent walls the form beside him seemed not to have stirred, but the gun was gone.

As they broke camp, Cal looked carefully for it. But there was no sign of it either in the tent, or in the immediate vicinity of the camp. He ate some of the concentrated rations he carried and drank some of the water he still carried. He made

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a point not to look to see if the alien was imitating him. There was a chance, he thought, that the alien was still not sure whether Cal had discovered the replacement.

Cal wondered coldly where on the naked mountainside Maury's body might lie — and whether the other man had recognized the attacker who had killed him, or whether death had taken him unawares.

Almost at once they were on the glacier proper. The glare of ice was nearly blinding. Cal stopped and uncoiled the rope from around him. He tied himself on, and the alien in Maury's warmsuit, without waiting for a signal, tied himself on also.

Cal went first across the ice surface, thrusting downward with the forearm-length handle of his homemade iceaxe. When the handle penetrated only the few inches of top snow and jarred against solidity, he chipped footholds like a series of steps up the steep pitch of the slope. Slowly they worked their way forward.

Beyond the main length of the hook rose a sort of tower of rock that was the main peak. The tower appeared to have a cup-shaped area or depression in its center — an ideal launching spot for the Messenger, Cal had decided, looking at it through a powerful telescopic viewer from the wreck of the *Harrier*. A rare launching spot in this landscape of steeply tilted surfaces.

Without warning a shadow fell across Cal's vision. He started and turned to see the alien towering over him. But, before he could move, the other had begun chipping at the ice higher up. He cut a step and moved up ahead of Cal. He went on, breaking trail, cutting steps for Cal to follow.

A perverse anger began to grow in Cal. He was aware of the superior strength of the other, but there was something contemptuous about the alien's refusal to stop and offer Cal his turn. Cal moved up close behind the other and abruptly began chipping steps in a sightly different direction. As he chipped, he moved up them, and gradually the two of them climbed apart.

When the rope went taut between them they both paused and turned in each other's direction — and without warning the world fell out from underneath Cal.

He felt himself plunging. The cruel and sudden jerk of the rope around his body brought him up short and he dangled, swaying between ice-blue walls.

He craned his head backward and looked up. Fifteen feet above him were two lips of snow, and behind these the blue-black sky. He looked down and saw the narrowing rift below him plunge down into darkness beyond vision.

For a moment his breath caught in his chest.

Then there was a jerk on the rope around him, and he saw the wall he was facing drop perhaps eighteen inches. He had been lifted. The jerk came again, and again. Steadily it progressed. A strength greater than that of any human was drawing him up.

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Slowly, jerk by jerk, Cal mounted to the edge of the crevasse — to the point where he could reach up and get his gloved hands on the lip of ice and snow, to the point where he could get his forearms out on the slope and help lift his weight from the crevasse.

With the aid of the rope he crawled out at last on the downslope side of the crevasse. Just below him, he saw the alien in Maury's clothing, buried almost to his knees in loose snow, half kneeling, half-crouching on the slope with the rope in his grasp. The alien did not straighten up at once. It was as if even his great strength had been taxed to the utmost.

Cal trembling stared at the other's crouched immobility. It made sense. No physical creature was possessed of inexhaustible energy — and the alien had also been climbing a mountain. But, the thought came to chill Cal's sudden hope, if the alien had been weakened, Cal had been weakened also. They stood in the same relationship to each other physically that they had to begin with.

After a couple of minutes, Cal straightened up. The alien straightened up also, and began to move. He stepped out and took the lead off to his left, circling around the crevasse revealed by Cal's fall. He circled wide, testing the surface before him.

They were nearing the bend of the hook — the point at which they could leave the glacier for the short slope of bare rock leading up to the tower of the main peak and the cup-shaped spot from which Cal had planned to send off the Messenger. The hook curved to their left. Its outer bulge reached to the edge of a ridge on their right running up to the main peak, so that there was no avoiding a crossing of this final curve of the glacier. They had been moving closer to the ice-edge of the right-hand ridge, and now they were close enough to see how it dropped sheer, a frightening distance to rocky slopes far below.

The alien, leading the way, had found and circled a number of suspicious spots in the glacier ice. He was now a slack thirty feet of line in front of Cal, and some fifty feet from the ice-edge of the rim.

Suddenly, with almost no noise — as if it had been a sort of monster conjuring feat — the whole edge of the ice disappeared.

The alien and Cal both froze in position.

Cal, ice axe automatically dug in to anchor the other, was still on what seemed to be solid ice-covered rock. But the alien was revealed to be on an ice-bridge, all that was left of what must have been a shelf of glacier overhanging the edge of the rocky ridge. The rock was visible now — inside the alien's position. The ice-bridge stretched across a circular gap in the edge of the glacier, to ice-covered rock at the edge of the gap ahead and behind. It was only a few feet thick and the sun glinted on it.

Slowly, carefuly, the masked and hidden face of the alien turned to look back at Cal, and the darkness

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behind his faceplate looked square into Cal's eyes.

For the first time there was direct communication between them. The situation was their translator and there was no doubt between them about the meanings of their conversation. The alien's ice-bridge might give way at any second. The jerk of the alien's fall on the rope would be more than the insecure anchor of Cal's ice-hammer could resist. If the alien fell while Cal was still roped to him, they would both go.

On the other hand, Cal could cut himself loose. Then, if the ice bridge gave way, Cal would have lost any real chance of making the peak. But he would still be alive.

The alien did not make an gesture asking for help. He merely looked.

Well, which is it to be? the darkness behind his faceplate asked. If Cal should cut loose, there was only one thing for the alien to do, and that was to try to crawl on across the ice-bridge on his own — an attempt almost certain to be disastrous.

Cal felt a cramping in his jaw muscles. Only then did he realize he was smiling — a tight-lipped, sardonic smile. Careful not to tauten the rope between them, he turned and picked up the ice ax, then drove it into the ice beyond and to his left. Working step by step, from anchor point to anchor point, he made his way carefully around the gap, swinging well inside it, to a point above the upper end of the ice bridge. Here he hammered and cut

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deeply into the ice until he stood braced in a two-foot hole with his feet flat against a vertical wall, lying directly back against the pull of the rope leading to the alien.

The alien had followed Cal's movements with his gaze. Now, as he saw Cal bracing himself, the alien moved forward and Cal took up the slack in the rope between them. Slowly, carefully, on hands and knees like a cat stalking in slow motion a resting butterfly, the alien began to move forward across the ice-bridge.

One foot — two feet — and the the alien froze suddenly as a section of the bridge broke out behind him.

Now there was no way to go but forward. Squinting over the lower edge of his faceplate and sweating in his warmsuit, Cal saw the other move forward again. There were less than ten feet to go to solid surface. Slowly, the alien crept forward. He had only five feet to go, only four, only three —

The ice bridge went out from under him.

X

The shock threatened to wrench Cal's arms from their shoulder-sockets — but skittering, clawing forward like a cat in high gear, the alien was snatching at the edge of the solid ice. Cal suddenly gathered in the little slack in the line and threw his weight into the effort of drawing the alien forward.

Suddenly the other was safe, on solid surface. Quickly, without waiting, Cal began to climb.

He did not dare glance down to see what the alien was doing; but from occasional tautenings of the rope around his shoulders and chest, he knew that the other was still tied to him. This was important, for it mean that the moment of their showdown was not yet. Cal was gambling that the other, perhaps secure in the knowledge of his strength and his ability to adapt, had not studied the face of this tower as Cal had studied it through the telescopic viewer from the *Harrier*.

From that study, Cal had realized that it was a face that he himself might be able to climb unaided. And that meant a face that the alien certainly could climb unaided. If the alien should realize this, a simple jerk on the rope that was tied around Cal would settle the problem of the alien as far as human competition went. Cal would be plucked from his meager hand and foot holds like a kitten from the back of a chair, and the slope below would dispose of him. He sweated now, climbing, trying to remember the path up the towerside as he had planned it out, from handhold to handhold, gazing through the long-distance viewer.

He drew closer to the top. For some seconds and minutes now, the rope below him had been completely slack. He dared not look down to see what that might mean. Then finally he saw the edge of the cup-shaped depression above him, bulging out a little from the wall.

A second more and his fingers closed on it. Now at last he had a firm handhold. Quickly he pulled

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himself up and over the edge. For a second perspiration blurred his vision. Then he saw the little, saucer sloping amphitheater not more than eighteen feet wide, and the further walls of the tower enclosing it on three sides.

Into the little depression the light of K94 blazed from the nearly black sky. Unsteadily Cal got to his feet and turned around. He looked down the wall he had just climbed.

Th alien still stood at the foot of the wall. He had braced himself there, evidently to belay Cal against a fall that would send him skidding down the rock slope below. Though what use to belay a dead man, Cal could not understand, since the more than thirty feet of fall would undoubtedly have killed him. Now, seeing Cal upright and in solid position, the alien put his hands out toward the tower wall as if he would start to climb.

Cal immediately hauled taut on the line, drew a knife from his belt and, reaching as far down as possible, cut the line.

The rope end fell in coils at the alien's feet. The alien was still staring upward as Cal turned went as quickly as he could to the center of the cup-shaped depression.

The wind had all but died. In the semi-enclosed rock depression the reflected radiation of the star overhead made it hot. Cal unsnapped his pack and let it drop. He stripped off the gloves of his warmsuit and, kneeling, began to open up the pack. His ears were alert. He heard nothing from outside the tower, but he knew that he had minutes at most.

He laid out the three sections of the silver-plated Messenger, and began to screw them together. The metal was warm to his touch after being in the sun-warmed backpack, and his fingers, stiff and cramped from gripping at handholds, fumbled. He forced himself to move slowly, methodically, to concentrate on the work at hand and forget the alien now climbing the tower wall with a swiftness no human could have matched.

Cal screwed the computer-message-beacon section of the nose tight to the drive section of the middle. He reached for the propulsive unit that was the third section. It rolled out of his hand. He grabbed it up and began screwing it on to the two connected sections.

The three support legs were still in the pack. He got the first one out and screwed it on. The next stuck for a moment, but he got it connected. His ear seemed to catch a scratching noise from the outside of the tower where the alien would be climbing. He dug in the bag, came out with the third leg and screwed it in. Sweat ran into his eyes inside the mask faceplate, and he blinked to clear his vision.

He set the Messenger upright on its three legs. He bent over on his knees, facemask almost scraping the ground to check the level indicator.

Now he was sure he heard a sound outside on the wall of the tower. The leftmost leg was too long. He shortened it. Now the middle leg was off. He lengthened that.

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He shortened the leftmost leg again . . . slowly . . . . there, the Messenger was leveled.

He glanced at the chronometer on his wrist. He had set it with the ship's chronometer before leaving. Sixty-six ship's hours thirteen minutes, and . . . the sweep second hand was moving. He fumbled with two fingers in the breast pocket of his warmsuit, felt the small booklet he had made up before leaving and pulled it out. He flipped through the pages of settings, a row of them for each second of time. Here they were . . . sixty-three hours, thirteen minutes —

A gust of wind flipped the tiny booklet from his stiffened fingers. It fluttered across the floor of the cup and into a crack in the rock wall to his right. On hands and knees he scrembled after it, coming up against the rock wall with a bang.

The crack reached all the way through the further wall, narrowing until it was barely wide enough for daylight to enter — or a booklet to exit. The booklet was caught crossways against the unevenness of the rock sides. He reached in at arm's length. His fingers touched it. They shoved it a fraction of an inch further away. Sweat rolled down his face.

He ground the thickness of his upper arm against the aperture of the crack. Gently, gently, he maneuvered two fingers into position over the near edge of the booklet. The fingers closed. He felt it. He pulled back gently. The booklet came.

He pulled it out.

He was back at the Messenger in a moment, finding his place in the pages again. Sixteen hours — fourteen minutes — the computer would take four minutes to warm and fire the propulsive unit.

A loud scratching noise just below the lip of the depression distracted him for a second.

He checked his chronometer. Sixty-three hours, sixteen minutes plus . . . moving on toward thirty seconds. Make it sixty-three hours sixteen minutes even. Setting for sixty-three hours, sixteen minus plus four minutes — sixty-three hours, twenty minutes.

His fingers made the settings on the computer section as the second hand of his chronometer crawled toward the even minute . . .

There.

His finger activated the computer. The Messenger began to hum faintly, with a soft internal vibration.

The sound of scraping against rock was right at the lip of the depression, but out of sight.

He stood up. Four minutes the Messenger must remain undisturbed. Rapidly, but forcing himself to calmness, he unwound the rest of the rope from about him and unclipped it. He was facing the lip of the depression over which the alien would come, but as yet there was no sign. Cal could not risk the time to step to the depression's edge and make sure.

The alien would not be like a human being, to be dislodged by a push as he crawled over the edge of the lip. He would come adapted and

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prepared. As quickly as he could without fumbling, Cal fashioned a slipknot in one end of the rope that hung from his waist.

A gray, wide, flat parody of a hand slapped itself over the lip of rock and began to change form even as Cal looked. Cal made a running loop in his rope and looked upward. There was a projection of rock in the ascending walls on the far side of the depression that would do. He tossed his loop up fifteen feet toward the projection. It slipped off — as another hand joined the first on the lip of rock. The knuckles were becoming pale under the pressure of the alien's great weight.

Cal tossed the loop again. It caught. He drew it taut.

He backed off across the depression, out of line with the Messenger, and climbed a few feet up the opposite wall. He pulled the rope taut and clung to it with desperate determination.

And a snarling tiger's mask heaved itself into sight over the edge of rock, a tiger body following. Cal gathered his legs under him and pushed off. He swung out and downward, flashing toward the emerging alien, and they slammed together, body against fantastic body.

For a fraction of a second they hung together, toppling over space while the alien's lower extremities snatched and clung to the edge of rock.

Then the alien's hold loosened. And wrapped together, still struggling, they fell out and down toward the rock below accompanied by a cascade of rocks.

XI

"Waking in a hospital," Cal said later, "when you don't expect to wake at all, has certain humbling effects."

It was quite an admission for someone like himself, who had by his very nature omitted much speculation on either humbleness or arrogance before. He went deeper into the subject with Joe Aspinall when the Survey Team Leader visited him in that same hospital back on Earth. Joe by this time, with a cane, was quite ambulatory.

"You see," Cal said, as Joe sat by the hospital bed in which Cal lay, with the friendly and familiar sun of Earth making the white room light about them, "I got to the point of admiring that alien — almost of liking him. After all, he saved my life, and I saved his. That made us close, in a way. Somehow, now that I've been opened up to include creatures like him, I seem to feel closer to the rest of my own human race. You understand me?"

"I don't think so," said Joe.

"I mean, I needed that alien. The fact brings me to think that I may need the rest of you, after all. I never really believed I did before. It made things lonely."

"I can understand that part of it," said Joe.

"That's why," said Cal, thoughtfully, "I hated to kill him, even if I thought I was killing myself at the same time."

"Who? The alien?" said Joe. "Didn't they tell you? You didn't kill him."

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Cal turned his head and stared at his visitor.

"No, you didn't kill him!" said Joe. "When the rescue ship came they found you on top of him and both of you halfway down that rock slope. Evidently landing on top of him saved you. Just his own natural toughness saved him — that and being able to spread himself out like a rug and slow his fall. He got half a dozen broken bones — but he's alive right now."

Cal smiled. "I'll have to go say hello to him when I get out of here."

"I don't think they'll let you do that," said Joe. "They've got him guarded ten deep someplace. Remember, his people still represent a danger to the human race greater than anything we've ever run into."

"Danger?" said Cal. "They're no danger to us."

It was Joe who stared at this. "They've got a definite weakness," said Cal. "I figured they must have. They seemed too good to be true from the start. It was only in trying to beat him out to the top of the mountain and get the Messenger off that I figured out what it had to be, though."

"What weakness? People'll want to hear about this!" said Joe.

"Why, just what you might expect," said Cal. "You don't get something without giving something away. What his race had gotten was the power to adapt to any situation. Their weakness is that same power to adapt."

"What're you talking about?"

"I'm talking about my alien friend on the mountain," said Cal, a little sadly. "How do you suppose I got the Messenger off? He and I both knew we were headed for a showdown when we reached the top of the mountain. And he had the natural advantage of being able to adapt. I was no match for him physically. I had to find some advantage to outweigh that advantage of his. I found an instinctive one."

"Instinctive . . ." said Joe, looking at the big, bandaged man under the covers and wondering whether he ought not to ring for the nurse.

"Of course, instinctive," said Cal thoughtfully, staring at the bed sheet. "His instincts and mine were diametrically opposed. He adapted to fit the situation. I belonged to a people who adapted situations to fit *them*. I couldn't fight a tiger with my bare hands, but I could fight something half-tiger, half something else."

"I think I'll just ring for the nurse," said Joe, leaning forward to the button on the bedside table.

"Leave that alone," said Cal calmly. "It's simple enough. What I had to do was force him into a situation where he would be between adaptations. Remember, he was as exhausted as I was, in his own way; and not prepared to quickly understand the unexpected."

"What unexpected?" Joe gaped at him. "You talk as if you thought you were in control of the situation all the way."

"Most of the way," said Cal. "I knew we were due to have a showdown. I was afraid we'd have it at

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the foot of the tower — but he was waiting until we were solidly at the top. So I made sure to get up to that flat spot in the tower first, and cut the rope. He had to come up the tower by himself."

"Which he was very able to do."

"Certainly — in one form. He was in one form coming up," said Cal. He changed to his fighting form as he came over the edge — and those changes took energy. Physical and nervous, if not emotional energy, when he was pretty exhausted already. Then I swung at him like Tarzan as he was balanced, coming over the edge of the depression in the rock."

"And had the luck to knock him off," said Joe. "Don't tell me with someone as powerful as that it was anything but luck. I was there when Mike and Sam got killed at the *Harrier*, remember."

"Not luck at all," said Cal, quietly. "A foregone conclusion. As I say, I'd figured out the balance sheet for the power of adaptation. It had to be instinctive. That meant that if he was threatened, his adaptation to meet the threat would take place whether consciously he wanted it to or not. He was barely into tiger-shape, barely over the edge of the cliff, when I hit him and threatened to knock him off into thin air. He couldn't help himself. He adapted."

"Adapted!" said Joe, staring.

"Tried to adapt — to a form that would enable him to cling to his perch. That took the strength out of his tiger-fighting form, and I was able to get us both off the cliff together instead of being torn apart the mintue I hit him. The minute we started to fall, he instinctively spread out and stopped fighting me altogether."

Joe sat back in his chair. After a moment, he swore.

"And you're just now telling me this?" he said.

Cal smiled a little wryly.

"I'm surprised you're surprised," he said. "I'd thought people back here would have figured all this out by now. This character and his people can't ever pose any real threat to us. For all their strength and slipperiness, their reaction to life is passive. They adapt to it. Ours is active — we adapt it to us. On the instinctive level, we can always choose the battlefield and the weapons, and win every time in a contest."

He stopped speaking and gazed at Joe, who shook his head slowly.

"Cal," said Joe at last, "you don't think like the rest of us."

Cal frowned. A cloud passing beyond the window dimmed the light that had shone upon him.

"I'm afraid you're right," he said quietly. "For just a while, I had hopes it wasn't so." END

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THE TWERLIK

BY JACK SHARKEY

Riches? Power? The twerlik was perfectly willing to give whatever the humans wanted—

It lay like a blanket over the cool gray sands, its fibrous substance extended to ultimate length in all directions, like a multi-spoked umbrella shorn of its fabric.

From each of its radiated arms — or legs; the Twerlik could employ them as it chose — innumerable wire-like filaments stretched outward at right angles to these limbs, flat upon the gray sands. And from them in turn jutted hair-like cilia, so that the entire body — had it been suitably stained and raised against a contrasting backdrop — resembled nothing so much as an enormous multiplumed fan, opened to a full circle and laid over an area of ten square miles. Yet weighed upon Earth-scales, its entire mass would have been found to tilt the needle barely beyond the one-pound mark. And its arms and filaments and cilia clung so tightly to the sand, and were so pallid of hue, that even were a man to lie face down upon it and stare with all his might, he would not be certain he saw anything but sand beneath him.

It could not break apart, of course. In its substance lay strengths beyond its own comprehension. For the planet upon which it had been born was too distant from its star to have developed cellular life; the Twerlik was a single, indestructible molecule, formed of an uncountable number of interlinked atoms. But — like the radar-grid it resembled — it could see, by the process of subtraction. Mild waves of light from the cold, distant star bathed it eternally. And so, objects that

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thrust in between the Twerlik and its source of life were recorded as negations upon its sensitive cilia, and the composite blotting-out of the light was sorted and filed and classified in its elongated brain in a fractional instant, so that it knew what went on in its vicinity.

It could see. And it could think. And it could do.

What it did, over endless ages, was convert some of the energy absorbed from the distant star into power. It used the power to work upon the atoms of the gray sand upon which it lay, and at a peripheral rate of about half an inch per Earth year, it turned the sand into its own substance and thus grew. The larger it became, after all, the more its surface could catch the faint light from the star. And the more light it could catch, on its planet whose rotation was equal to its period of revolution, the more sand it could transmute; and the more sand it transmuted, the larger it became.

That was its entire cycle of life. The Twerlik was content with it. Absorb, transmute, grow. Absorb, transmute, grow. So long as it could do these things, the Twerlik would be happy.

Then, partway through its hundred billionth trip around the dim, distant star, the men of Earth came.

Its first awareness of their arrival was a sort of bloating sensation, not unlike a mild twinge of nausea, as the cilia far beneath the gleaming fires of the rocket-thrust began hungrily to over-absorb.

The Twerlik did not know what was occurring, exactly, but it soon got itself under control, and would not let those cilia nearest the descending fires partake overly of the unexpected banquet. It made them take a share proportionate to their relationship in size to the rest of the enormous body, and it urged the rest of itself to partake similarly. By the time the slim metal rocket had come down, midway between the outermost fringes of the Twerlik and its splayed-out central brain, the creature had been able to feed more than in the previous three periods of the planetary revolution.

"This thing which has come," it told itself, "is therefore a *good* thing."

It was pleased at this new concept. Until the ship had come, the Twerlik had simply assumed that life was being lived to its peak. Now it knew there were better things. And this necessity to parcel out absorbable energy to its limbs was new, also. It gave the Twerlik a greater awareness of its own brain as the key motivator of this farflung empire which was itself. "I am a *me*," it realized, "and the rest of my extensions are but my parts!" It almost glowed with delight — not to mention an overload of absorbed energy — at the thought of all it had learned in a few moments. And then it realized what "moments" were, too; until the arrival of the ship, everything had been the same, and so the vast eons it had been there registered as no longer than an eyeblink would to a man, because it had had no shorter events for comparison of

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time. "So quickly!" the Twerlik mused. "I know what goodness and betterment are; I know that I am a *me*; I know the difference between a moment and an eon."

The Twerlik was abruptly aware, then, of yet another new sensation; gratitude. "This tall thing," it said, and at the same time filed away its first knowledge of differentiation in heights for later reference, "has done the *me* a service, in a moment, and the *me* is *bettered*, and *grateful*!"

And then it knew its first pain, as this rush of new concepts attempted to file themselves in sub-atomic synaptic structures incapable of coping with such a swift influx.

The Twerlik's brain throbbed with this cramming. To ease the pain, it used a fraction of the energy it had absorbed from the fires of the rocket, and enlarged the surface of the thinking-section. Wisely — for it was growing wiser by the moment — it over-enlarged it, that it might not again know pain should more concepts try and engrave themselves upon its consciousness. And just in time, too. For it suddenly needed room for concepts of foresight, prudence, headache, remedy and alertness.

Being lost in its own introspections, it turned its mind once more to the New Thing on the planet as it felt another increase in the absorption of its cilia. It did some rapid subtraction from the shifts in light from its star, and then it "saw" that there were things like unto itself emerging from the tall thing.

Its brain instantly added the concept of pity to the collection.

For these like-creatures were stunted travesties of the Twerlik. Only four limbs, and a limb-stub on top. And these four fairly developed limbs had but five filaments to each, and no apparent cilia, save upon the useless limb-stub. And the five filaments upon each of the two limbs nearest the *me* were bound up in layers of something that was not part of the creatures at all.

"These magnificent creatures," mourned the Twerlik, "having so little of their own, have yet shared their largesse with me!" For the creatures were bearing bulky objects out of the tall thing, and setting them upon the gray sand and upon the Twerlik itself. And from these objects there flared a great deal of brightness and warmth, and the creatures were standing amid this brightness and warmth, and doing incomprehensible things with four-limbed objects that had no life at all . . . and the cilia of the Twerlik were absorbing all they could of this unexpected feast.

"I can grow now!" it told itself. "I can grow in a short period as I have never in my life grown before. I can spread out until I cover the entire — planet." The Twerlik puzzled over the latest addition to its increasing concepts. From where had this strange idea come, this idea of a gigantic ball of solid material swinging about a star? And it suddenly knew that those other four-limbed non-living creatures were called "chairs" and "tables", and that the poorly deveoped things were named "men".

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The Twerlik tried to solve this puzzle. How were these concepts reaching it? It checked its substractions, but there was nothing new blocking the starlight. It checked its absorptions, but its rate of drainage upon the spilled-over warmth and light from the "electric heaters" and the "lamps" — and it realized, again enlarging its brain to store these concepts — was just as it had been. Yet these new ideas were reaching it somehow. The ideas came from the "men", but in what manner the Twerlik could not determine.

Then it checked into yet another one of its newfound concepts, "pressure", and found that there was something incomprehensible occurring.

Its first awareness of this concept had been when the "spaceship" ("Larger, brain, larger!") had pressed down upon the limbs and filaments and cilia of the *me*. Then secondary awarenesses that told the Twerlik of differentiations in "pressure" came when the "men" had trodden upon it, and again when the "chairs" and "tables" and "electric heaters" and "lamps" had been "set up". ("More room, brain, more room!") But there was a new kind of "pressure" upon the *me*. It came and went. And it was sometimes very heavy, sometimes very faint, and it struck only near the "men" at its fullest, being felt elsewhere along the cilia in a "circle" ("Grow!") about them, but less powerfully, and in a larger "circle" about that one, but much less powerfully.

What was it, this thing that came and went, and rammed and fondled and stabbed and caressed, so swiftly, so differently — and all the time kept filling its increasing brain with new concepts?

The Twerlik narrowed its field of concentration, starting at the outermost "circle", moving inward to the next, and drawing closer and closer to the "men", seeking the source of this strange alternating pressure. And then it found it.

It came from the "mouths" of the men. They were "talking". The Twerlik was received "sound".

Its brain began to hurt terribly, and once again it made use of its newly absorbed energies and grew more brainpart for the *me*. Then it "listened" ("More! More!") to the "talking", and began to "learn".

These men were only the first. There would be others, now that they knew that the "air" and "gravitation" and "climate" were "okay". There would be "houses" and "streets" and "children" and "colonization" and "expansion". And — the Twerlik almost shuddered with joy — *light*!

These men-things needed light constantly. They could not "see" without light. There would be more heaters, more lamps, campfires, chandeliers, matches, flares, movies, candles, sparklers, flashlights — ("Grow! *Grow*! GROW!")

Right here! On this spot they would begin! And all that spilled over from their wanton use of energy would belong to the *me*!

"Gratitude" was a poor word to express the intensity of the Twer-

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lik's emotions toward these men-things now. It had to help them, had to repay them, had to show them how much their coming meant.

But how? The greatest thing in creation, so far as the Twerlik was concerned, was energy. And they had energy to spare, energy aplenty. It could not give them that as a gift. It had to find out what *they* valued most, and then somehow give this valued thing to them, if it could.

Desperately, it "listened", drawing in concept upon concept, seeking and prying and gleaning and wondering . . .

It took all that they said, and filed it, cross-indexed it, sorted it, seeking the thing which meant more than anything to these men-things. And slowly, by winnowing away the oddments that cluttered the main stream of the men-things' ambitions and hopes, the Twerlik learned the answer.

And it was within its power to grant!

But it involved motion, and the Twerlik was not certain it knew how motion might be accomplished. In all the eons of adding to its feathery perimeter, it had never had occasion to shift any of its limbs from where they lay upon the sand. It was not quite certain it could do such a thing. Still, it told the *me*, if there were a way, then it was obligated to use this way, no matter what the difficulties thus entailed. Repayment of the men-things was a legitimate debt of honor. It had to be done no matter what the cost.

So it attempted various methods of locomotion.

It tried, first, to flex and wriggle its filaments as the men-things did, but nothing happened. Bewildered, it checked through its file of new concepts and discovered "leverage". On this principle did the men-things move. They had "muscle" which "contracted" and caused a "tendon" to shift the angle of a "bone". The Twerlik had none of these necessary things.

So it tried "propulsion", the force which had moved the spaceship, and discovered that it lacked "combustible fuel" and hollow channels for the energy called "firing tubes" and some built-in condition of these tubes called the "Venturi principle".

It pondered for a long time then, not even bothering with things the men knew as "pistons" and "cylinders" and "wheels" — since the use of these involved a free-moving segment and the Twerlik could not operate save as a whole.

Finally, after thousands of those intervals which it had come to think of as "moments", it came upon the concept of "magnetism". The forces involved came well within its scope.

By subtle control of the electron flow along the underside of one of its five-mile limbs, and the creation of an electronic "differential" flow along the top, it found that the consequent repulsion-attempts of its upper and lower surfaces resulted in the tip of the limb describing a "curl". Once this basic motion had been achieved, the rest was simple, for the Twerlik learned swiftly. In a few short moments, it had

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evolved a thing called "coordination" and found to its delight that it could raise, lower or otherwise manipulate limbs, filaments and cilia with ease, in a pleasant, rippling whip-motion.

This new power being tested swiftly and found quite enough for its purposes, it set to work repaying the men for their great kindness to it.

The men, it noted as it worked, were undergoing a strange somnolence called "sleep", inside the spaceship. The Twerlik realized with joy that it could indulge in what men-things called a "surprise" if it worked with sufficient rapidity.

Draining its energies with uncaring profligacy, it coiled and swirled and contracted itself until its cilia and filaments and limbs lay all about the spaceship and everywhere within it save upon the men-things. The Twerlik found that it was greatly weakened by this unwonted output, but it was a dedicated Twerlik now, and did not stop its continuation to the task at hand. It worked, and molded, and rearranged. It grew dizzy with the effort, until a stray groping strand of cilium found the energy-crammed metal housed in the tank near the firing-tubes of the spaceship. Into this metal the cilium burrowed, and then began drawing upon the energies therein like an electronic siphon, feeding out the particles of raw power to the rest of the Twerlik, that the entirety of the creature might perform this labor of love.

It took many thousands of moments for its task to be done, but it was a contented — if desperately weary — Twerlik which finally uncoiled its incredible barely-greater-than-a-pound enormous size from the spaceship.

Once again it retreated in all directions, to lie weakly in the dim light of the distant star and await the awakening of the men-things.

It noted, disinterestedly, that the shape of the spaceship was slightly altered. It was widening slowly near the base, and bulging about the middle, and losing height. The Twerlik did not care. It had shown its gratitude, and that was all that mattered.

Abruptly, men-things were leaping from the doorway of the ship, shouting empty sounds which the Twerlik could only interpret as signs of "fear", though no "words" were used. They were — ah, that was the term — "screaming".

It could make no sense of it. Were the men-things mad? Had it not given them what they desired most? Had it not even worked upon the "food" and "water" for them, so that every item they possessed would be vastly improved?

The Twerlik could not understand why the men were acting so strangely. It waited peacefully for them to use the now-improved heaters and lamps, that it might restore some of its deeply sapped strengths. But they made no move to do so. They were using words, now, having gotten over their "screaming". Words like "trapped" and "impossible" and "doomed".

They were, sensed the Twerlik,

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terribly unhappy, but it could not comprehend why.

It seemed to have to do with its gesture of repayment. But along this line of reasoning the Twerlik could not proceed without bafflement. It thought momentarily of removing the gift, and restoring things to what they had been, but then realized that it no longer possessed the necessary energies.

So it sat and pondered the ways of men, who seemed to desire nothing so much in life as the acquisition of an element called "gold", and yet acted so oddly when they were given a spaceship made of it.

The Twerlik sadly filed "screwy" in close juxtaposition to the men-concept in its brain, and when at last the men-things had laid upon the gray sand and moved no more, it transmuted their elements into that substance they loved so well with its last burst of waning strength.

Then it lay there upon the cool gray sand, sucking life from the dim, distant star of its planet, and thought and thought about men-things, and wondered if it would ever be satisfied to be nothing but a Twerlik forever, with no more creatures to be good to.

It knew one thing, however: It must not give men gold again.

The next spaceship to land upon its planet, after two revolutions about the sun, was filled with men-things, too.

But these men-things had had an accident to a thing called their "reclamation tanks". They were all thick-tongued and weak, and a quick analysis of their conversation showed the Twerlik that these men were different from the others. They desired nothing so much as a comparatively simple molecule known to them as water.

The Twerlik was only too eager to help.

And, when the transmutation of this second spaceship had been completed, right over the thirsty gray sands, the Twerlik proudly added "permeability" to its vocabulary.

END

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Short Course In Button Pushing

BY JOSEPH WESLEY

We've all heard of push-button warfare— but is it going to be as simple as that?

Ask me: "What is the range of one of our latest supersonic Anti-Air Naval missiles?"

Ask me, and I will refuse to tell, you, of course. The information must be considered to be highly classified — very sensitive.

And there is at least one other reason that I won't tell you the range of those missiles: I can't. As I have asked the question for you, it makes no sense. It is about as meaningful as the question, "How high is up?"

Let me rephrase the question for you. Perhaps you meant to ask, "How far can the missile be made to fly, when fired from one of our Navy missile ships?" I could almost answer that, if security rules permitted. And no quibbling is involved. It is not merely a restatement of the earlier question.

The earlier question suggests, at least, that you have a desire to know the range capability of the missile as an anti-air warfare weapon, while the second question appears to ask for the maximum range that it can be made to reach as it falls back into the water, without regard for its ability to carry out the mission for which it was designed.

There is nothing particularly foolish about asking this rephrased

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question, and it may, in fact, be the one that you intended. Especially could this be true if you happened to be the Range Safety Officer of one of our great guided-missile ocean test ranges. If that is your job, then you are worried about the possibility of dropping a bird on the deck of a passing merchantman, or into one of our coastal cities. It would also be something you would want to know if you were the admiral in command of one of our Naval Task Forces. Then your concern would be with the chance of having one of your weapons, in falling from the sky after missing a target, mess up one of the ships under your command.

As the admiral, and as a lot of other people (including any of the enemy aircraft pilots, if there is a shooting fracas) you also want to know the effective range, against an enemy target, of this elaborate and by no means inexpensive weapon of yours. So you — the admiral — call in your Chief of Staff, or your Anti-Air Warfare Officer, or whoever happens to be close at hand at the time, and you command him firmly, "Tell me the effective range of the anti-air warfare missiles of my Force!"

Now it is unlikely that the Chief of Staff or the Anti-Air Warfare Officer will tell the admiral right out that this new question of his is still not precisely enough stated to be meaningful. If, however, they are really worthy of the "special trust and confidence" that, according to their commissions, the President of the United States places in them, and if they are to earn their not particularly munificent salaries, then they must make very sure that the admiral gets the word — because any attempt to answer the question, as he has asked it could only serve to mislead him.

Why is this true? Well, for one example, what type of target is the admiral thinking about? These days radars must "lock on" targets before missiles can fire. The ability to do so depends on the size of the target.

Air targets vary in "effective radar cross-section" from fractions of a square meter up to tens of square meters. For small radar targets, the range of lock-on may be far less than the range that the missile can fly. (We won't go here into the problems of defining "effective radar cross-section", except to say that the reflection fluctuates and glints, and that therefore there is much disagreement about a meaningful definition.)

The speed of the target comes in here, too. If, against a target that is coming straight in toward me at slow speed — say, six hundred feet a second — I can expect just barely to get locked on in time to fire my missile for intercept at a certain range, then against a faster target, my maximum effective range of intercept must be shorter. This is true, of course, because the faster target closes more during the time of flight of my missile, and I am starting my lock on at the same range in either

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case, assuming that such other parameters as target size and characteristics are unchanged.

(You will notice, by the way, that in spite of the popularity of referring to Mach number in talking of the speed of jet aircraft, I was not tempted to speak of my target as approaching at Mach 0.5; I stuck with feet-per-second. This is because the Mach number is the ratio of the target speed to the speed of sound in the air through which the target is travelling, while the ship that is firing the surface-to-air missile is interested in the actual over-the-water target speed. The true closing speed is a measure of the time remaining before the target releases a bomb or a missile, or crashes into your ship, or accomplishes whatever other mission that your antagonist had planned for it. You may also have noticed that I am mixing meters and feet in a highly unrigorous manner. That is not my fault. Express, in the Navy, range in yards, altitude in feet, velocity in knots, feet-per-second or Mach number, and radar cross-section in square meters. We are discussing a Navy missile, and so we will follow the Navy's style.)

Also to be considered, there is the size of the target — not measured in terms of target effective radar cross-section, but in terms of vulnerable area. (This is a second definition of target size, very different from the first. There are others.) A small target may require more than one missile to be exploded near it in order to build up an acceptably high probability of kill. This may require the use of salvo fire. Then the effective range is reduced to the range of intercept of the last missile of the salvo, assuming that the last missile of the salvo has been fired before the first has reached intercept. This means, of course, that the admiral's firing doctrine enters into the determination of the effective range of the missile system.

Target altitude is important too. A missile may have far shorter range capability at low altitude, where the air is dense and hard to plough through, than it does up where the air is thin.

In addition, we must give due consideration to the problem of missile maneuverability versus target maneuverability. If the target dodges, the missile is designed to try to correct and catch it anyway. Whether it can do so depends in large measure on the g-maneuver capability — the angular acceleration that the missile can pull in turning to close in on the evading target. This varies with altitude, since the aerodynamic surfaces are generally fixed in size and shape, while the density of the air is changing. Of course, the air density is changing for the target in the same manner as for the missile. It also varies with missile velocity; a missile that is coasting along after its rocket propulsion has burned out may still intercept a target. But as it slows down the maneuverability gradually decreases.

And then, if we have reason to think that the target will not dodge,

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we may specify the intercept capability against a non-maneuvering target. That will give us considerably greater effective range than would otherwise be true. We will not discuss here the problem of radar noise in giving to your missile system the impression that a steady target is actually maneuvering, and forcing your missile to try to respond, but it is important.

So far so good. Let us assume that the admiral understands all of these limitations. Then he takes a deep breath, and his face stops turning purple, and he asks you in a controlled voice, "Tell me the effective range of the anti-air warfare missiles of this Force against the enemy Frump II attack aircraft (Mach 2 at 50,000 feet with a 3g maneuver capability carrying two Floozy air-to-surface free-fall guided bombs. Radar cross-section in S band is — etc. — etc. — etc.) I plan to fire single missile salvos."

Let us assume further that you do not ask the admiral how a single missile can constitute a salvo. His terminology is usual.

You are still not in a position to answer his question fully and accurately, unless you have a considerable amount of additional information, some of it hard to come by. You still require, for example, a good deal of knowledge of the environment, some of which is controlled by the enemy.

So you delve into your store of background knowledge of enemy jamming to define the expected electronic and passive counter-measure conditions. For the weather environment, you can afford to be magnanimous here, perhaps, and include it as a sort of natural counter-measure condition. Jamming, depending on its type and your system's defenses, can cause the effective range of a missile system to vary enormously.

If you feel that your knowledge of the probable environment is good enough so that you are not required to excuse yourself and rush away to do background research, then you can take a deep breath and say that you are almost ready to answer, except that you have to know one more thing: Are you trying to defend yourself — your own ship — against incoming targets, or are you primarily trying to defend other ships in the formation against what, to your system, then become crossing targets? The effective range is probably quite different for the two cases.

Then, if by this time the admiral has not kicked you out of his office or off his bridge onto your fantail, you can give him his answer. If your voice lacks confidence, it is because there are other factors of potential importance that you have not taken into account. Also certain of your estimates of parameters are at best educated guesses, and at worst wild hunches.

Who says that missile warfare is just button pushing? END

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STAY OUT OF OUR TIME!

BY WILLARD MARSH

ILLUSTRATED BY NODEL

That century was out of bounds for everybody—for a very good reason!

I

Coming down the exit ramp from the Suspended in the total anonymity he'd enjoyed through thirty-seven years of life, Hiram Wetherbee plucked up sufficient courage at the third-level arcades to approach a travel agency. Its door, activated by his presence, was unrolling a red carpet and spraying him with attar of roses. He regained his balance, wiped the fog from his glasses and saw there was an elderly couple ahead of him. He took a chair that adapted itself to him and examined the posters.

Visit the 27th Century — a vacation of Tailored Thrills.

Jaded? Discriminating? Come to the quaint old A.D. Sixties and see Rome burn.

Thirty-two's the Century for You!

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Discover America with Columbus! Be our guest in the Greatest War to Come!

Glancing away uneasily, Hiram watched the couple at the desk.

"It's a sentimental whim of ours," the man was explaining. "Whenever I can snatch a few days, my wife and I go off for a quiet New Year's celebration."

"You see, we met at a New Year's party," his wife said shyly.

"I understand perfectly," the clerk beamed. "Perhaps you'd care to see the Forty-second century in? They've done some amusing things with artificial gravity — "

"Yes, I know." The man's wattles quivered. "Thrashing around in the air like a ruddy seal."

"We did the forties pretty thoroughly on our last anniversary," his wife apologized. "This time we'd like something a little closer to home."

"Where the natives haven't been completely spoiled," the man added. "We were thinking of the weekend commencing December 31st, 2299, on into 2300."

"I'm afraid that's out of the question, sir. If you'll examine your passport," the clerk said, "you'll see that those are iron-curtain centuries."

"Political poppycock! Why?"

"We outside of diplomatic circles know very little, sir." The clerk looked a little embarrassed. "It seems that — well, to put it bluntly, they just don't *like* tourists of twentieth-century descent."

"Damn it all — they're descendents of us!"

The clerk nodded sadly. "The logic of it is beyond me, sir."

The woman took her husband's arm soothingly. "Perhaps he could book us for the following century."

"What about that, young man? Could you give us a split weekend in the Twenty-fourth?"

"I wish I could, sir, but that's off-limits too."

The clerk looked acutely depressed at the thought of losing such a large commission. Passage for two different time sectors required double fares.

"*However,*" he suddenly brightened, "2399 is only in the Twenty-fourth century by a technicality. At the stroke of 2400 you'd be in the Twenty-fifth, and *its* restrictions were lifted just last week. If you'd be willing to arrive, say, at eleven p.m., I don't imagine it would create an intertemporal incident. And besides, you can usually bribe the customs officials of those foreign epochs . . ."

Conversation of this kind always made Hiram nervous. Stepping into a busy street and arriving safely on the other side was his idea of high adventure. That people voluntarily climbed mountains or plumbed the ocean depths in their own day was terrifying enough, but to deliberately seek risks by visiting alien centuries — before or after they could have died of old age by staying home — was unimaginable. But then Hiram realized he'd never been strong on imagination. As his high school yearbook had put it, "One look at Hiram Wetherbee and

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you'll never forget the person next to him."

The travel clerk had made out the couple's ticketplate, and now they were discussing hotel reservations.

"If I succeed in swinging a certain negotiation next month," the man was saying, "we'll be in a position to do some *real* traveling."

"Splendid, sir. And there'll probably be another depot available by then. We're opening them as fast as we can secure reciprocal treaties."

"Good show. What's the farthest out it's possible to go?"

"Well, a pilot team went all the way to the Fifty-first century," the clerk said. "However, there was nothing there."

"Nothing there?"

"Nothing at all, sir."

"Hmmm," the man said thoughtfully. "Wonder what happened?"

Hiram shuddered.

"Dear," he heard the woman whisper, "the gentleman over there looks rather ill. It wouldn't be charitable to delay him; he's probably going somewhere for therapy."

"Quite. I say there," the man boomed at Hiram, "won't you step ahead of us?"

"No, that's all right," Hiram said quickly. "I can come back next week. Or even next year — "

"Nonsense, we'll be here for hours. Come along, now."

Meekly Hiram went up to the clerk.

"Yes, *sir,*" the clerk said heartily, "some ray dueling in the roaring forties? Or a ringside seat for the Black Plague?"

"Oh, no, I don't even want to leave the twentieth century," Hiram said in alarm. "I just thought I'd take a little trip back to 1902."

"1902? Surely you're pulling my leg, sir. Why, that's in the dullest decade of recorded history. We *never* get a call for that period."

"Well, maybe after I get acclimated I could make a side trip to the 1890's," Hiram said uncomfortably. "I thought I'd feel my way into it as I go along. I guess I'm a stick in the mud." He laughed.

The clerk waited for him to finish laughing, then made out Hiram's ticketplate. Hiram wrote a check for the passage, started to leave as the elderly couple rose from their chairs. Then abruptly swinging around to thank them, he collided clumsily with the man.

Both ticketplates fell to the floor. Hiram scrambled to retrieve them, pocketed his own and handed the couple theirs.

Hurrying outside in an agony of embarrassment, he hoped his daily quota of mistakes had been completed.

II

I, the undersigned Tempconsul of the United States of America, hereby request all whom it may concern to permit safely and freely to pass, and in case of need to give all lawful aid and protection to Hiram Ruben Wetherbee, a citizen of the United States, Twentieth Century. Given under my hand and the seal of the Temporal Consulate of the United

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States at Topeka, Kansas, February 20, 1989.

RESTRICTION: This passport is not valid for travel to the Twenty-first to Twenty-fifth Centuries inclusive CANCELED CANCELED. This passport is not valid for travel to the Twenty-first to Twenty-fourth Centuries inclusive unless specifically endorsed under authority of the Department of Time as being valid for such travel.

He had renewed it just last week, when he knew he was committed to the journey. It was his third passport (they expired every four years). Twelve years ago he'd made a bargain with himself to make the Trip, whenever he could raise the money and the courage it required. Neither came easily.

As a boy he'd been pretty much out of things. The neighborhood gangs had no use for him. He liked girls too much. And liking them so desperately, his tongue froze when they came near him, his feet dragged and his glands betrayed him. In high school, although his realistic appraisal of his abilities made sports impossible, he had a consuming envy of the athletes. In dreams he saw himself a football hero, immune to all conceivable pass defenses on and off the field. Then he gradually discovered that the athletes seldom got the girls (That is, in the literal sense, which was the only sense Hiram functioned in). They went to bed too early.

It was the delicate night-blooming youths who reaped the succulent harvests that the athletes planted at seven and, because of training regulations, abandoned at ten. The tubercular poets with their Keatsian melancholy, their doomed expressions that aroused feminine hearts to heights and depths of consolation; the musicians, who assaulted these vulnerable hearts as vigorously as they did a keyboard; and the artists — ah, the lucky artists! Their bad teeth and shocking manners seemed so forgivable, their freedom from pimples so astonishing. Hiram decided to become an artist.

But even here he was a failure. If he had been a gigantic, complex failure he would have been a success. However, nothing Hiram ever did was gigantic or complex. In a field requiring either talent, or the wit or gall or eccentricity to masquerade as talent, he was hopelessly outclassed. He painted things the way he saw them, and he saw them as unoriginally as a three-dollar camera. Inventing a subject would have been as impossible for him as inventing the words to defend it. As a result he continued making C's in art all through high school, and on graduating he became a post office censor. He still referred to himself as a Sunday painter, and haunted art galleries (where he was usually mistaken for the attendant), awed by the conversation as much as by the works which inspired it.

Then fifteen years ago his life was revolutionized — although not outwardly, of course. The first girl who had ever granted him a second date told him, "Hiram, why don't you go back to 1902?" This was be-

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fore travel even existed, but he resolved then and there that if it ever did exist, he'd be ready for it.

For where else in the universe of space and time could he, Hiram Wetherbee, without changing a single facet of his personality — automatically be regarded as a modern, up-to-the-minute artists, the darling of the salons and the hellion of the boudoirs?

And just three short years following that fateful evening, the dream came true. The portals to the past had been thrown open, and he took out a passport.

Now as the gleaming scaffolding of St. Louis bulked against the horizon, Hiram fastened the seat belt and replaced his passport. Like a bronze bird in free fall, the Interurban weightlessly descended the stratochannel to Chanute, Illinois: Time Central, Twentieth Century, U.S.A.

III

The border guard was a young man of quiet authority, dressed in the natty cloak and dagger of the Temporal Commission.

"Outward bound, I take it, sir. Foreign or domestic port?"

"Domestic," Hiram said in false nonchalance, setting his bag down and removing his passport.

"You won't need that," the guard smiled. "No passports are required as long as you don't leave the century. Purpose of your trip?"

"P-purpose?" Hiram had the sudden wild notion that if he voiced his real purpose he'd be arrested on a morals charge. "Why, uh, I just thought I'd look in on my grandmother's wedding."

"Recreation, then."

"You bet! I mean, I guess that covers it."

"Fine. Happy landings." The guard walked away.

Hiram waited restlessly, then finally realized that a luggage inspection was as unnecessary as a passport. The depot was a small functional room, equipped with several chairs to handle any passenger congestion. There was a desk at one end and a sort of booth at the other. Hiram stepped inside it and read the instruction placard. Then he inserted his ticketplate in the slot and pulled the lever. It seemed so anticlimactic somehow.

There was the buzz of the verifier, authenticating the coding. There was a red light winking on, a sensation of shift combined with a slight vertigo, then a sensation of settling. A green light came on, the panel slid back and, with the seasoning of eighty-seven years of travelling behind him, Hiram Watherbee stepped out into 1902.

It had the austere anonymity of depots any place in time. A few stars seemed to be missing from the flag, but Hiram was always weak on early-century geography. The guard who met him was in the shapeless drab uniform of a postman or a Suspended conductor, which seemed considerably less frivolous than the way guards dressed these days.

"Greetings, peasant. May I scan your passport?"

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Hiram extended his passport, knowing the guard was being overly officious, but admiring the soundness of it. It was refreshing to see a man who cared enough about his job to take precautions, however unnecessary. Then he noticed the peculiar expression on the man's face.

"Is anything wrong?" he said anxiously.

The guard ignored him, calling over his shoulder. "Joe, may I enlist your aid?"

"With pleasure, Sam." Another sensibly attired customs official came from behind the desk to join them.

"Mind keeping an eye on this peasant while I make a call?"

Hiram watched him disappear into the adjacent office, hoping the delay wouldn't be to great. He was eager to hail a hansom, get out to the bohemian quarter and set up his garret. He would spend the next few days painting a still life or two, then still exhilarated from the throes of creation, needing a shave but beyond the petty conventions, he would go out to the park, tip his hat to the first coquette who dropped her handkerchief, and invite her to come up and see his . . .

Hiram's erotic fantasies were interrupted by the reappearance of the first guard.

"Well, I've just been on the screen with Immigration," he said. "There's no doubt you're guilty of illegal entry. That's a pretty serious offense, I might warn you."

Hiram was stunned. "But they told me at the other end —"

"And of course the felony will be compounded if you're carrying any contraband. Open your luggage, please."

Dazedly, Hiram unlocked his bag and stood by in a nervous sweat while they made a thorough search.

The guard named Joe dredged up a cigarette lighter. "Explain this item."

"Why, it — it lights cigarettes," Hiram stammered.

"It does what to which? Never mind, we'll find it." He leafed through a regulations book. "Twentieth Century . . .C, Candle . . . Cello . . . Cigarette: see Tobacco." He flipped the pages. "Tobacco: a narcotic. Well, that seems harmless enough."

Hiram sighed in relief. He could have sworn that tobacco was known as far back as 1902. After explaining several other of his possessions, he was subjected to a casual cross-examination.

"Ever interested in playing checkers, by any chance?"

"I tried to learn one time," Hiram admitted, "but the rules were pretty complicated."

"Ever experience a desire for flower arranging?"

"Oh no, I wouldn't even know where to begin."

"Ever attend a puppet show?"

"Just once. It seemed kind of silly, you could tell they were really only wooden dummies."

Both guards were smiling encouragingly at him. Their suspicion had lessened considerably.

"Well, from the quality of your responses — and the quality of your tastes, I might add," the first guard

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said, running an envious hand over Hiram's Sunday blue serge suit before he closed the suitcase, "— it's obvious that in your native time sector, you're a peasant of the first water."

The second guard glanced at his watch. "And since it'll be the Twenty-fifth century in less than an hour from now, we're not going to hang you because of a little technicality," he chuckled.

"That is, provided you clear Mind Search," the first guard said. "Quick, Sam — the peasant's fainted!"

When Hiram came to, the nightmare was still in progress.

He tried to explain that it was all a tragic mixup. They were sympathetic but inflexible. Passangers' ticketplates were, after all, their own responsibility and not the government's.

"Now this'll only be a routine examination of your memories," Mr. Joe said soothingly. "Merely to make sure you're not importing any paradoxical techniques or viewpoints."

"If so, we'll remove them," Mr. Sam said, "and they'll be returned upon your release — er, your re-entry to the —" he winced in distaste —"Twentieth Century. At your own expense, of course."

They stood him before a machine.

"Just press your head against the plate and take a deep breath. Hold it . . . Fine. You can put your hat back on."

"Now then," Mr. Joe said cheerfully, "while we're waiting for the plate to be developed — I wonder if you'd care to join us in a little, ah, experiment? Of course you may stand upon the fifth amendment and refuse to cooperate. But in that case you'd be guilty of violating the sixty-third amendment."

Hiram hastily informed them he was at their complete disposal. They brought in a reassuringly somber individual who was introduced as Doctor Jones. The doctor had a half dozen assorted pegs and a board with different sized holes. He explained that Hiram was supposed to put the pegs into the holes they fitted.

"But I've never done this before," he protested.

"That's quite all right," the doctor said. "Try."

Hiram chewed his lower lip thoughtfully. "Could you give me a hint?"

"Of course." The doctor did the first two for him. "And now with just a *little* imagination, you should be able to see where the rest go."

Hiram made three different attempts, but it never came out right somehow.

He look up apologetically, afraid they might be disappointed with the experiment. But oddly enough they seemed quite pleased. Just then a technician hurried in with Hiram's mindplate.

"Doctor Jones," he whispered, "get a scan of this. In every sensitized area — completely blank!"

"Amazing," the doctor murmured. He turned to the guards. "Are you sure he's actually a national of *that* century, and not just passing through?"

"Quite sure, doc."

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The doctor turned to shake Hiram's hand heartily. "Mr. Wetherbee, as the first citizen of your century to enter ours, welcome aboard! And in behalf of the entire Bureau, may I say that if you are representative of Twentieth Century culture, the immigration ban should have been lifted long before now."

IV

Time Central, Twenty-fifth Century, U. S. A., turned out to be Lockheed, Los Angeles. The depot was much larger than the one back home, because of the office space required for screening and interrogation. Hiram finally found his way to Currency Exchange, which of course was the most pressing consideration. Until he converted his money into theirs, he was helpless.

The exchange clerk was a flashy young man in a sports outfit consisting of black pants and a brown coat. Hiram handed him his cashier's check and glanced around. The Cubicle was in the corner, ready to whisk him safely back into his native time. At the stroke of midnight he would be a cleared tourist, free to come and go as he liked. But the people had been so friendly to him (after the initial misunderstanding had been straightened out), so downright folksy, that Hiram decided he just might stay awhile. Perhaps five minutes, long enough for some sightseeing (keeping the Customs Building in view at all times) before buying his passage home. A great pulse of adventure beat at the thought.

Glancing back at the desk, he was startled by the clerk's expression. It was a peculiar combination of eagerness and apprehension.

"Sir, these are Twentieth Century dollars," he said. "I'm afraid I'll have to summon the authorities."

Suavely, Hiram tossed his passport on the desk. He smiled at the clerk's relief when he discovered that the visa was in perfect order.

"Forgive me, sir, my error. But one can't take chances."

"That's right," Hiram agreed. "Look before you leap, I always say."

The clerk gasped in admiration. "What a brilliant way to put it!"

Hiram lowered his eyes modestly. "Yes, well, if you'll just give me whatever money I have coming—"

"Of course, sir. Sorry to be so garrulous."

After a diligent study of old catalogues, the clerk computed the equivalent of Twenty-fifth Century currency in terms of Hiram's cashier's check.

"Here you are, sir — minus our minimum service charge."

Hiram stared at the metal disk in horror. *"One coin?"*

"That's the prevailing rate of exchange, sir," the clerk said reproachfully. Then he leaned forward in concern. "Try holding your head between your knees."

Hiram sat down and tried it. It helped a lot. He didn't faint.

"After all, sir," he heard the clerk saying across a vast throbbing distance, "the credit-unit is perfectly negotiable."

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Hiram raised his head weakly. "C-credit-unit? Then — you mean, it's not really a coin? It's like a . . ."

"A letter of credit, I believe you'd call it in your vector, sir."

After several minutes of hysterical giggling, Hiram was completely himself again.

Curious, he asked the clerk how he was so familiar with Twentieth Century customs. The clerk explained that he was a student of history, specializing in the mid-Twenties. It was difficult, even dangerous, getting clearance for research into that period. But it had a certain morbid fascination for the younger element — students, intellectuals, artists.

"But I imagine you had radicals back in your own day, sir," the clerk said, giving Hiram a knowing look.

The traveler is always flattered by an interest in his native birthtime, and Hiram was only human. He shook the young man's hand in gratitude and asked to know his name.

"I'm Al, sir."

"Al who?"

"Oh, I see what you mean. Al Jones, sir."

"Jones," Hiram said thoughtfully. "Any relation to the doctor in Immigration?"

Al shook his head. "I don't believe so, sir."

"Just thought I'd ask. His surname was Jones too."

Al looked reproachful again. "We *all* bear the surname of Jones, sir. It's much less complicated that way."

"Oh. Yes. I can see where it would be," Hiram said politely.

Fatigued from the strain of conflicting customs, he decided that a cup of coffee and a sandwich would be just the thing to pick him up. Besides being a way of killing time till it was midnight, when he could go out for a quick stroll, come back and buy his ticketplate and be done with travelling for good. It was clear that he would be a misfit in any age. The dream of 1902 could be replaced by the mellow reveries he would have, safe by his fireside, of 2400. There was no point in compounding the number of girls whose charms he would never savor. He could be a lousy lover in his own age more comfortably than in any foreign one.

He asked if there was a snack bar in the building.

"Well, there's always the Assemblomat," Al said doubtfully, "but for a discriminating traveler like yourself I'd recommend the Cafe Erotica. Just a short hop from here, turn right at Las Vegas —"

"No, the whateveritis'll be fine." Hiram said quickly, gathering that it was a vending machine of some kind.

It occupied the entire rear wall of the depot. He could dial any known food in the world, merely by placing his credit-unit in the scanner, which would deduct the cost of his selection and return it to him.

Hiram hesitated. "It sounds awfully complicated."

"It does?" Al beamed. "I don't mean to brag, sir, but it was com-

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plicated for me too at first. Of course not as complicated as it would be for a peasant of your background. Step this way and we'll work it out together."

Hiram accompanied him to the vast machine, which was prepared to assemble any dish for him that he could name. Confronted by such an infinity of decisions, he decided on a piece of fruit.

"I guess I'll have an apple."

"An Apple Which, sir?"

Hiram stared at him in confusion. "A — just plain apple?"

Al chuckled. "My, that *is* an exciting concept, sir. You must be a bit of a philosopher, along with your other gifts. Which certainly include a provocative sense of humor. Now an Appled Herring always goes nicely as a stopgap between meals," he said. "Or if your palate is trained to predominent flavors, I might suggest the Appled Goat Cheese."

Hiram dazedly agreed on the Apple Goat Cheese.

Al dialed it. The Assemblomat spit back the credit-unit.

"Your *selection* values fifteen lincolns," the speaker-slot said in mechanical reproach, "your credit-unit values *eleven* lincolns. This is a recording." The lights went out, the great machine fell silent.

"Well, that's certainly one on *us*," Al said jovially. "Apparently, sir, you'll have to buy a larger credit-unit."

Hiram was aghast. "But I can't," he whimpered. "That cashier's check represented my entire life savings."

"Tough sugar," Al said sympathetically. "Of course the rate of exchange between our two time sectors *is* a bit depressed at present. And then there was our minimum service charge. But still in all, how did you come to have so little money? Gambling?"

"Certainly not."

"Women?"

"No," Hiram said wistfully.

"Then what happened to your inheritance?"

"Inheritance? I've worked for a living all my life."

"Oh, how clever of you, sir!" Al sighed enviously. "Jobs are almost impossible to find these days. I was fortunate enough to secure this position through family connections. It's only part-time, of course."

Hiram discovered that his nails had been chewed to the quick.

"Look," he said desperately, "you said something about being a student of history. Could you sort of bring me up to date on what's been happening in these next — I mean these last four centuries?"

The pattern was quite clear, Al explained, the trend inevitable. When full automation arrived, the machines increased by such prodigious duplication that the entire planet was soon blanketed by a robotic network. It tilled man's soil, clothed him from the products of his seas and air, and transformed all his deserts into Edens. But then mankind discovered that material abundance had been purchased at the price of spiritual depravity.

What the Twentieth Century inaugurated, in the Age of Anxiety,

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had by the Twenty-first become the Age of Hysteria. Faster than anyone could specialize, specializations grew. The arts degenerated into criticism of criticism, culture became a semantic jungle. Living became so complex and overimaginative that leisure was torture. Till finally, at the peak of the madness, the Twenty-fourth Century rebelled, severing diplomatic relations with its immediate predecessors, and strapped itself to the psychiatrist's couch.

Now, with a sane new century dawning, the great lobotomy had been accomplished. The virus of Imagination had been eradicated. Reason and Reality were enthroned, and, reluctantly, communication was about to be established with the decandent Mother Century.

"Gee, I had no idea we were such troublemakers," Hiram said in embarrassment. "But as long as you're willing to let bygones be bygones—"

Al closed his eyes, repeating in a rapturous whisper: "...bygones be by...I wish *I'd* said that. But to return to more mundane affairs—it seems that you're a lincolnless foreigner, and you need credit-unit to exist. Let's attack the problem realistically, shall we?"

"Sure," Hiram said. "Well, I guess I need a job. I'm willing to do manual labor, anything."

Al smiled indulgently. "One has to be pretty high up in government circles to qualify for manual labor. What was the nature of your previous employment?"

"I was a post office censor."

"Post office, post office," Al muttered thoughtfully. "Oh yes, I remember. A form of communication, wasn't it?"

"You mean...?"

He nodded regretfully. "The written word invariably leads to sabotage, which of course is a felony. But perhaps you had some hobby you could utilize?"

Hiram admitted that he painted a little, and the clerk eagerly assured him that painters of every caliber were in huge demand. No matter how poor a dauber he was, if he could even push a brush across a plastiboard, he'd have no trouble finding patrons in this great new renaissance of realism.

"Real art, you know, is pretty much of a lost art," he confided.

I wish I'd said that, Hiram thought.

"If nothing else," Al went on, "you could always get a commission to do depot paintings. They're invariably the most unsophisticated art form of any culture."

Hiram brightened, remembering the type of murals in depots of his own day: Hitler's Last Stand, Dr. Casey's Vigil, Self-Portrait by Jackie Gleason—pictures with a historical message, the kind that had always been his inspiration.

"...Take that atrocious specimen there, for example."

Hiram turned in the direction Al pointed.

It was a work of art that had no comparison by Twentieth Century standards. Beside it, Miro was colorblind, Braque was someone's maiden aunt, and Picasso was Hiram

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Wetherbee. It existed on a dozen subtle levels of perception, each exquisitely self-sufficient. It wasn't a painting, it was a monument.

"Now if you could bring yourself to do that sort of trash," Al said.

"I couldn't," Hiram said hopelessly.

"I'm happy to see, sir, that your integrity is commensurate with your taste."

"You don't understand!" Hiram said wildly. "I'm broke, I'm stranded! Unless I can beg, borrow or steal a ticketplate somewhere and get back to my own —"

"Oh, I wouldn't recommend that, sir. Tampering with transportation is a felony. And there's been a recent constitutional amendment passed permitting the restoration of cruel and unusual punishment in the case of felonies."

Hiram gripped the edge of the desk. "But what can I *do*?"

"The procedure is quite simple, sir," Al said gently. "You apply at the Department of Public Welfare for mercy-killing. After all, this *is* the Age of Realism."

As a clock struck somewhere, he pulled a whistle from his pocket and tooted it discreetly.

"Happy New Year!"

V

At the Customs Building exit Hiram drew a deep breath, activated the door and crept out into 2400 A. D.

A broad intersection lay ahead, unpopulated except by dummy shrubs and composition trees. Keeping close to the side of the building, he darted around the corner. And then he stopped dead in his tracks.

There before him, under a sourceless light, stood a blonde lady more beautiful than his most daring dreams.

In a turtleneck sweater and a sequined burlap skirt, she was watching the sky with a pensive look. Hiram caught his breath in adoration. At the sound she turned, smiled and tossed a handful of confetti at him. Desperately eager to reciprocate, Hiram thought of shredding his passport and strewing it at her feet. But she'd turned back to the sky.

Through the hammering of his heart, he could distinguish distant horns and windborne laughter.

"How ingenuous a moment, when the year turns. The release, the revelry," she said. "Perhaps it's some recidivistic racial memory, on the order of encouraging the sun to labor through the winter solstice. Atavism can be so amusing, *nicht*?"

"Yes, ma'am," Hiram said awkwardly. "Sure is noisy."

The blonde lady wheeled, staring at him. "Why, how succinct!" Her teeth shone in pleasure, and she brought the palm of her hand to her hair to smooth it. "How witty."

She laughed huskily, came forward and impulsively kissed him. Hiram was petrified with delight.

"You're so calm," she murmured. "Oh, you rogue, you think you'll drive me to excesses by your boredom." She released him with a sly, sidewise look. "And you just might at that."

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Hiram stood there panting. "Oh no, I wouldn't take advantage of your kindness, Miss Jones," he said, "seeing how it was New Year's and all."

"Stop it, you devil. Before I lose my head completely." She slipped her arm through his. "Now come along, I want you to meet my roommate. He thinks he's the only man in the state of Los Angeles with savoir-faire."

In delicious confusion, Hiram floated along behind her. They came to a bench where a tall, handsome man in oxford gray knickerbockers was exchanging a New Year's kiss with a feminine companion. Then he added a Twenty-fifth Century fillip to it that made Hiram redden and glance away.

"Why, you're blushing," Miss Jones said. "It's positively indecent," she whispered in Hiram's ear, and bit it. "Who *does* your cosmetics? John darling," she called, "whenever you're finished there's someone you simply *must* meet."

"Till Tuesday, then?" Hiram heard the man say.

"I'll be there with bells on," the girl breathed, and then her heels diminished down the avenue.

Now the tall man rose from the bench. "Yes, Mary?"

"John, this is . . . Miss Jones turned to Hiram, who clumsily introduced himself. "I tell you, a girl can't trust herself around him. He's a regular Don Washington."

"A who?" Hiram said nervously.

"Don Washington," Miss Jones repeated, "the mythical philanderer who fathered an entire nation."

"Must have been after my time," Hiram apologized. "You see I'm from the Twentieth Century."

They were immediately thrilled, as anyone is at something smacking of the illicit. Both of them hastened to assure him that the government had always had the highest regard for the *people* of his century. It was their *ideology*, their crass spirituality that had, till now, made coexistence impossible. And they so envied his experience of something more than ordinary flat travel.

"I've flatted all over the world, of course," Miss Jones sighed, "but always in the same dreary dimension. As a matter of fact," she turned to John, "I had an impulse to lunch in Paris today, and as a result it cost me a thousand lincolns — and for simply *nothing*."

"Really? What'd you have?"

"The lobstered tapioca at Neo-Maxim's. It didn't have the least subtlety."

"Exactly. What time were you there?"

"Oh, I'd say two-ish. You mean —"

"You must have just missed me."

Hiram joined in their laughter at the coincidence. "Yes, sir," he said, "it's a small world."

Thoughtfulness replaced amusement in their faces.

"It is, isn't it?" Miss Jones said intensely. "And it took you to point it out. That's what I mean about *real* travel, it's so broadening. Oh, I wish I were wealthy like you and could come and go anytime that beckoned me."

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"As a matter of fact," Hiram said eagerly, "I'm a little strapped for cash, and I was wondering if you could see your way clear to —"

But just then a seedy-looking man in a frayed lactic topcoat sidled up to them.

"Evening, peasant," he said cheerlessly. "I was wondering if you could see your way clear to lending me ten lincolns for a bowl of coffee-fied —"

"Sorry, you know the rules," John said in embarrassment.

"But please, if I don't get some solid nourishment inside me soon I'll starve to death."

"Good heavens. How soon?"

The panhandler shivered a little. "I'll be lucky if I last seventy-two hours."

"Oh, John, can't you do anything?" Miss Jones said anxiously.

"Of course, my dear," he replied, equally moved. He reached in his pocket. "It's unrealistic to take the long way around, old bean. So here's a little something to lighten your journey."

The three of them watched the grateful human derelict return to the shadows.

"What was that you gave him?" Hiram asked.

"Oh, nothing, really. Just some aspirin cyanide."

Miss Jones squeezed John's arm appreciatively. "He's all heart, this guy of mine. Now what were you saying before we were — oh yes, something about money?"

"Money?" Hiram said groggily. "Oh yes, well it isn't too important, is it? I mean, when you get right down to it." He cleared his throat. "After all," he said, "it can't buy happiness."

His wonderful new friends were watching Hiram in anticipation of his next bon mot. They were seated on a stream of air two feet above the floor in John's bachelor suite. The invisibility of the chairs was a little distracting, but he had to admit they were comfortable enough. The conversation had apparently been brilliant, the music evidently superb. His wonderful new friends lacked only one thing: the ability to realize he was hungry. And there was no way he could tell them outright, without violating their rules of etiquette (which would probably be a felony).

"Yessiree," Hiram said delicately, "some beer would sure go good along now. And some pretzels."

"What does one do with them?" John asked.

"Well, you sort of eat one and drink the other."

"How perfectly bovine," Miss Jones said. "I should think one might at least reverse the process."

Hiram watched her legs wistfully. "I suppose you're right."

To keep his mind off his various clanging appetites, he re-examined the paintings on the wall. They were magnificent, of course, like all art in this era. But they couldn't have been better than that incredible mural in the depot, because they were almost understandable. However, their brilliant technique more than made up for their lack of complexity.

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He discovered both the Joneses watching him in guarded eagerness.

"Which is your favorite, old phallus?" John asked casually.

Hiram studied a small oil with a vague resemblance to a stylized haystack, with its geometrical metal straws heaped in a masterful pattern. Then he reconsidered a larger, haunting work that gave him the sensation of something on the edge of memory. Against a quasi-green background, there was a bowl containing several small round objects.

He chose that one, and once again they seemed delighted with his taste. They waited for him to make some penetrating comment.

Hiram scratched his head thoughtfully. "But what's it supposed to represent?"

They sighed, ecstatically.

"You've *such* a way of striking to the core of the problem," John said. "For of course that's the eternal problem of art. Only I've never heard it summed up so deftly, have you, Mary?"

"Never," Miss Jones said decisively.

"Perhaps the title would yield some clue to what I was after," he continued. "I call it 'Appleated Spheroids on the Grass, Alas.'"

Why, of course, Hiram thought. It could almost be a bowl of apples at that. Except that he'd never seen checkered blue apples. Then he realized what John had said.

"You mean it's yours?"

Miss Jones laughed. "John is one of the most successful artists of our time," she explained. "Therefore of all time."

John smiled modestly. "Still, if one misses perfection by even the smallest margin, he's just as incompetent as the scrubbiest depot illustrator. And I was after no less than perfection itself in this particular project. May I explain the line of thought that led to its creation?"

"By all means," Hiram said, overjoyed at the opportunity of hearing the greatest painter of all time describe his philosophy of art.

"Well, I was digging for the very essence of the flavor known as apple."

"Apple what?" Miss Jones said.

"No, no, dear! The flavor-in-itself, the *ding an sich*. I'll admit it's a difficult concept to grasp, but I felt that — well, what if one could isolate the thing that we call 'apple,' separate it from its associative components? Do you follow me, old phallus?"

"Not quite," Hiram admitted, "but go on, I'm all ears."

The Joneses looked at each other. "What a metaphor!" John breathed. Then after a respectful silence he continued. "Well, I spent literally months searching through antique dictionaries, and by a stroke of immense good fortune, I finally saw apple *itself* listed, the naked word shorn of its suffixes. After pursuing cross-references I gathered the idea that it was a 'fruit' of some sort . . ."

Miss Jones and Hiram looked at each other in separate confusion.

"Well, I won't bore you with the semantics, but I eventually traced 'fruit' to 'tree,' and then it was just a question of working out the most

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economical shape the apple-object would require." John sat forward for Hiram's reaction.

"B-but, that's not the way they look at all."

Their faces froze.

"Well, of course you're entitled to your own opinion," John said politely.

"Really! I've never heard such an insulting remark," Miss Jones said heatedly. "I suppose you think you could do better."

"Oh no, of course not," Hiram stammered, "I wouldn't think of comparing myself to someone like — I only meant —"

"After all," John said, "even criticism as excellent as yours musn't be entirely negative. Unless it's constructive, what possible hope do you extend the artist? You keep your apple, and I'll keep mine."

"Ours," Miss Jones said huskily, slipping into his arms.

And now Hiram could see that instead of being on separate chairs, they were on some kind of sofa. After awhile, being products of the Age of Realism, they assumed a rather embarrassingly realistic position. Embarrassing to Hiram, that is. He decided perhaps he was in the way.

Outside, he eventually found the equivalent of a Suspended, and when the robot conductor returned his credit-unit he had one lincoln left.

He got off at the customs Building and spent the lincoln in the Assemblomat for a stick of chewing gum. Limburgered spearmint. Then he curled up on the floor. The benches would probably be softer at the Department of Public Welfare, but he was too exhausted for the walk.

The Currency Exchange clerk was bending over him solicitously.

"Sorry to awaken you, sir, but there's an ordinance against loitering in federal buildings."

Hiram scrambled to his feet in confusion. It was morning. His body was a mass of uneased aches.

"I thought you worked evenings."

"That's right, sir," Al said cheerfully. "Normally I pull swing shift, but a sudden vacancy on the day watch opened up, and I was lucky enough to get it. I suppose I'm a pig, working around the clock when there are so many unemployed, but I can't seem to control my sensual nature."

The utter desperation of Hiram's position returned to him. "Could you direct me to that place where they, uh, kill people?"

"Better than that, sir, I can have the van sent for you if you like." He put the call through and Hiram thanked him. "No troube at all, sir. It's a public convenience. After all, that's what we pay taxes for."

Hiram nodded absently. "Is it, uh, quick?"

"Oh yes, it's quite instantaneous," Al assured him. "Of course, your processing is apt to take a few days. Now if you'll excuse me, sir."

He returned to his desk, and Hiram spent his last remaining span of life considering what it had amounted to. That didn't take long. Then he emptied the contents of his pockets on the desk.

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"I thought that since you'd been so kind," he told Al in embarrassment, "I'd leave you these things for sort of souvenirs. I mean, since you're interested in Twentieth Century culture."

"Why, thank you, sir, that's most considerate." Al poked through the accumulation in curiosity, and Hiram explained the various items: a key ring, an unused aphroceptive, a Suspended transfer.

"And that's a five-dollar bill," he said wistfully. "Of course it wouldn't be worth anything here."

Al examined the portrait on it. "One of *your* lincolns, sir?" he chuckled. "Well, hardly. But what is this strange object?"

"Oh, that's just a silver dollar," Hiram said. He tried to avoid remembering it was his lucky 1902 dollar. "It took five of those to make that bill there."

"A dollar?" Al said in amazement. He studied the date. "A Twentieth Century *dollar,* sir? You mean it really was a tangible artifact, and not merely a banking term?"

"Oh, they were real, all right," Hiram said nostalgically.

"Just think of it. If it wouldn't offend you, sir," Al said, "I'd be willing to give you my personal unit for five thousand credits in exchange for it."

VI

Hurrying down the empty, mock-arbored thoroughfare, the shiny credit-unit clutched in his sweaty palm, Hiram still couldn't believe that he'd been saved.

The world was a deliriously happy place again. Five thousand credits hadn't been enough to purchase his escape from this insane era. It would have taken him only eight years back (constituting high felony in his case); but it could surely keep him alive. For years, even, if he made every lincoln of it go for only the most urgent of necessities. By then maybe he could even find a job somewhere. The rooming house Al had suggested — the cheapest possible — lay just ahead. Rounding the corner, Hiram halted in confusion.

Occupying several steelscaped acres, serene in its cantilevered stone, the rooming house resembled a deluxe hotel back home.

Hiram checked the address again, but there was no mistake. Apprehensively, he mounted the rolling walkway to the lobby. The landlady behind the desk fluffed her hennaed hair, sniffed his breath suspiciously and led him to an upstairs apartment. Hiram blinked at the luxury.

"There's the bed," she said flatly. "It's only imitation brass, but you're not particular or you wouldn't be here. And don't get the idea those are real kerosene lamps and try stealing them." She pointed to the wall. "There's the vendomatic, for your food. It ain't up to the standards of the Assemblomat, but it's included in the utilities."

"Oh yes, it's lovely," Hiram said quickly. "And I'd forgotten meals went with it. It's just that — if I only can afford it."

"Five thousand credits a week," the landlady said. "In advance."

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"F-five *thous*—"

"Let's not argue," she said wearily. "I'm not running a winter resort for peasants. If you can find a cheaper flop in Los Angeles, I'll give you a week's rent free."

A sob forced its way past Hiram's quivering lips. He knew, with the authority of thirty-seven years of estimating misfortune, that it must be true. He had just a week's reprieve, then: seven slender days between him and the Quick Way. Slowly he handed his credit-unit over, saw it disappear into the landlady's authenticator belt with the metallic sound of a falling axe.

The door swung shut behind her. On it were the house regulations, including an extract from the penal code, citing the various felonies that came under the category of arrears in rentals.

The bedsheet was extremely difficult to rip. Its molecular composition gave it a stubborn cohesion, but it finally yielded to Hiram's frenzied teeth.

Grasping the small rectangle of material he'd torn free, he staggered to the food dispenser. He punched a button, and a slimy white substance issued from the wall. With a wild laugh of triumph, he smeared it on the sheet.

It was milk. The kind of milk found in Twenty-fifth Century rooming houses catering to the dregs of humanity. The hopelessly old-fashioned, reactionary misfits who liked things subtle and complex. This milk was plenty subtle. It tasted as if a mackerel had been marinated in it for a month. All the food was like that, every combination Hiram had been dialing for this last mad week.

Now he was done, finished, at rope's end. The public welfare worker was arriving at noon. He'd go gladly. But first, by God, he was going to paint himself an honest, everlasting apple.

The milk was impossible to drink, but it was excellent for priming. It made a dandy substitute for zinc white, and the sheet made a splendid canvas. The food dispenser also furnished him with any number of evil-smelling, brilliant reds, and a tuft from the rug was better than a sable brush.

Happier than he had been in years, Hiram laid out his palette and set to work.

Within what might have been two hours, it was completed. Square in the middle of his canvas stood a bowl of apples. They were just plain red. They had green stems and white highlights, and were about as dull and uninspired as it was possible for a bowl of apples to be. They even looked boring to Hiram. Yet their utter ordinariness was disproportionately refreshing. Decisively, he painted in the title.

Bowl of Apples, Hiram Wetheree, January 7, 2400.

He rose, stretched, gave it a last fond look and turned it to the wall.

And just in time, for there was a knock at the door. The van had came for him.

"Viva the Twentieth Century!" he shouted, his voice cracking, and threw open the door.

Miss Jones was standing there, in

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a transparent yellow slicker inscribed with funny slogans.

"So this is where you disappeared," she said. "Naughty boy, running out on me like that! I've turned the entire city upside-down to find you."

"But I thought — but you were busy and everything," Hiram mumbled in embarrassment, recalling so vividly the scene on the airsofa.

"I was?" Miss Jones frowned fetchingly. "Oh yes, I remember. But that was only *sex*. It's that streak of vulgarity in you that disturbed me when you criticized John's painting. Your motives were so intricate. If it had been from something so chic and simple as jealousy, I would have adored you for it."

Her eyes caught Hiram's canvas, turned to the wall. She clapped her hands in delight.

"And it *is*," she said, "because *you* paint too. How wonderfully uncomplex of you, it clears up everything. Though I suppose you're a rotten artist. But then, a girl can't have everything."

She rose and turned his canvas to the light, just as an ominous knock sounded at the door. Miss Jones gave a gasp, staring in disbelief at the painting. Hiram shrugged and opened the door.

A tall, cadaverous-looking individual stood on the threshold, wearing the black public welfare armband.

"I trust we're ready for The Journey, Mr. Wetherbee?" he said silkily.

"I guess so," Hiram answered, beyond despair. "Be ready in two shakes of a lamb's tail." He walked over to Miss Jones. "You'll have to excuse me now," he said awkwardly. "It's been nice knowing you."

Miss Jones turned. There were tears in her eyes. "This thing you've done, this painting," she said in a choked voice, "I can't bear to look at it too long."

"I suppose not," Hiram said miserably.

"Its beauty is almost blinding. How could any single human be so talented?"

"You mean you *like* it?" he said in astonishment.

"*Like* it?" Miss Jones said, suffused with ecstasy. "Can one merely *like* water if one has been thirsty all one's life? There's never been a genuine like you in existence."

The public welfare worker had joined them. "Never," he agreed in quiet reverence. "Even the title is sheer poetry."

Miss Jones reached her hand to Hiram's arm in awe. "What a privilege just to know you," she said huskily.

Through his confusion, Hiram was aware of Miss Jones stepping close to him, the public welfare worker's stammered offers of money for the painting and then his discreet withdrawal, and the sound of the van pulling away from out front.

"Can I kiss you?" Miss Jones whispered.

Hiram closed his eyes in bliss. He had won through, he had Arrived.

"Can a duck swim?" he answered. END

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LUCIFER

BY ROGER ZELAZNY

He came like Lucifer, to bring light . . . and to be destroyed!

Carlson stood on the hill in the silent center of the city whose people had died.

He stared up at the Building—the one structure that dwarfed every hotel-grid, skyscraper-needle, or apartment-cheesebox packed into all the miles that lay about him. Tall as a mountain, it caught the rays of the bloody sun. Somehow it turned their red into golden halfway up its height.

Carlson suddenly felt that he should not have come back.

It had been over two years, as he figured it, since last he had been here. He wanted to return to the mountains now. One look was enough. Yet still he stood before it, transfixed by the huge Building, by the long shadow that bridged the entire valley. He shrugged his thick shoulders then, in an unsuccessful attempt to shake off memories of the days, five (or was it six?) years ago, when he had worked within the giant unit.

Then he climbed the rest of the way up the hill and entered the high, wide doorway.

His fiber sandals cast a variety of echoes as he passed through the deserted offices and into the long hallway that led to the belts.

The belts, of course, were still. There were no thousands riding

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them. There was no one alive to ride. Their deep belly-rumble was only a noisy phantom in his mind as he climbed onto the one nearest him and walked ahead into the pitchy insides of the place.

It was like a mausoleum. There seemed no ceiling, no walls, only the soft *pat-pat* of his soles on the flexible fabric of the belt.

He reached a junction and mounted a cross-belt, instinctively standing still for a moment and waiting for the forward lurch as it sensed his weight.

Then he chuckled silently and began walking again.

When he reached the lift, he set off to the right of it until his memory led him to the maintenance stairs. Shouldering his bundle, he began the long, groping ascent.

He blinked at the light when he came into the Power Room. Filtered through its hundred high windows, the sunlight trickled across the dusty acres of machinery.

Carlson sagged against the wall, breathing heavily from the climb. After awhile he wiped a workbench clean and set down his parcel.

Then he removed his faded shirt, for the place would soon be stifling. He brushed his hair from his eyes and advanced down the narrow metal stair to where the generators stood, row on row, like an army of dead, black beetles. It took him six hours to give them all a cursory check.

He selected three in the second row and systematically began tearing them down, cleaning them, soldering their loose connections with the auto-iron, greasing them, oiling them and sweeping away all the dust, cobwebs, and pieces of cracked insulation that lay at their bases.

Great rivulets of perspiration ran into his eyes and down along his sides and thighs, spilling in little droplets onto the hot flooring and vanishing quickly.

Finally, he put down his broom, remounted the stair and returned to his parcel. He removed one of the water bottles and drank off half its contents. He ate a piece of dried meat and finished the bottle. He allowed himself one cigarette then, and returned to work.

He was forced to stop when it grew dark. He had planned on sleeping right there, but the room was to oppressive. So he departed the way he had come and slept beneath the stars, on the roof of a low building at the foot of the hill.

It took him two more days to get the generators ready. Then he began work on the huge Broadcast Panel. It was in better condition than the generators, because it had last been used two years ago. Whereas the generators, save for the three he had burned out last time, had slept for over five (or was it six?) years.

He soldered and wiped and inspected until he was satisfied. Then only one task remained.

All the maintenance robots stood frozen in mid-gesture. Carlson would have to wrestle a three hundred pound power cube without assistance. If he could get one down from the rack and onto a cart without

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breaking a wrist he would probably be able to convey it to the Igniter without much difficulty. Then he would have to place it within the oven. He had almost ruptured himself when he did it two years ago, but he hoped that he was somewhat stronger — and luckier — this time.

It took him ten minutes to clean the Igniter oven. Then he located a cart and pushed it back to the rack.

One cube was resting at just the right height, approximately eight inches above the level of the cart's bed. He kicked down the anchor chocks and moved around to study the rack. The cube lay on a downward-slanting shelf, restrained by a two-inch metal guard. He pushed at the guard. It was bolted to the shelf.

Returning to the work area, he searched the tool boxes for a wrench. Then he moved back to the rack and set to work on the nuts.

The guard came loose as he was working on the fourth nut. He heard a dangerous creak and threw himself back out of the way, dropping the wrench on his toes.

The cube slid forward, crushed the loosened rail, teetered a bare moment, then dropped with a resounding crash onto the heavy bed of the cart. The bed surface bent and began to crease beneath its weight; the cart swayed toward the outside. The cube continued to slide until over half a foot projected beyond the edge. Then the cart righted itself and shivered into steadiness.

Carlson sighed and kicked loose the chocks, ready to jump back should it suddenly give way in his direction. It held.

Gingerly, he guided it up the aisle and between the rows of generators, until he stood before the Igniter. He anchored the cart again, stopped for water and a cigarette, then searched up a pinch bar, a small jack and a long, flat metal plate.

He laid the plate to bridge the front end of the cart and the opening to the oven. He wedged the far end in beneath the Igniter's doorframe.

Unlocking the rear chocks, he inserted the jack and began to raise the back end of the wagon, slowly, working with one hand and holding the bar ready in the other.

The cart groaned as it moved higher. Then a sliding, grating sound began and he raised it faster.

With a sound like the stroke of a cracked bell the cube tumbled onto the bridgeway; it slid forward and to the left. He struck at it with the bar, bearing to the right with all his strength. About half an inch of it caught against the left edge of the oven frame. The gap between the cube and the frame was widest at the bottom.

He inserted the bar and heaved his weight against it — three times.

Then it moved forward and come to rest within the Igniter.

He began to laugh. He laughed until he felt weak. He sat on the broken cart, swinging his legs and chuckling to himself, until the sounds coming from his throat seemed alien and out of place. He stopped abruptly and slammed the door.

The Broadcast Panel had a thou-

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sand eyes, but none of them winked back at him. He made the final adjustments for Transmit, then gave the generators their last check-out.

After that, he mounted a catwalk and moved to a window.

There was still some daylight to spend, so he moved from window to window pressing the "Open" button set below each sill.

He ate the rest of his food then, and drank a whole bottle of water and smoked two cigarettes. Sitting on the stair, he thought of the days when he had worked with Kelly and Murchison and Djizinsky, twisting the tails of electrons until they wailed and leapt out over the walls and fled down into the city.

The clock! He remembered it suddenly — set high on the wall, to the left of the doorway, frozen at 9:33 (and forty-eight seconds).

He moved a ladder through the twilight and mounted it to the clock. He wiped the dust from its greasy face with a sweeping, circular movement. Then he was ready.

He crossed to the Igniter and turned it on. Somewhere the ever-batteries came alive, and he heard a click as a thin, sharp shaft was driven into the wall of the cube. He raced back up the stairs and sped hand-over-hand up to the catwalk. He moved to a window and waited.

"God," he murmured, "don't let them blow! Please don't — "

Across an eternity of darkness the generators began humming. He heard a crackle of static from the Broadcast Panel and he closed his eyes. The sound died.

He opened his eyes as he heard the window slide upward. All around him the hundred high windows opened. A small light came on above the bench in the work area below him, but he did not see it.

He was staring out beyond the wide drop of the acropolis and down into the city. His city.

The lights were not like the stars. They beat the stars all to hell. They were the gay, regularized constellation of a city where men made their homes: even rows of streetlamps, advertisements, lighted windows in the cheesebox-apartments, a random solitaire of bright squares running up the sides of skyscraper-needles, a searchlight swivelling its luminous antenna through cloudbanks that hung over the city.

He dashed to another window, feeling the high night breezes comb at his beard. Belts were humming below; he heard their wry monologues rattling through the city's deepest canyons. He pictured the people in their homes, in theaters, in bars — talking to each other, sharing a common amusement, playing clarinets, holding hands, eating an evening snack. Sleeping ro-cars awakened and rushed past each other on the levels above the belts; the background hum of the city told him its story of production, of function, of movement and service to its inhabitants. The sky seemed to wheel overhead, as though the city were its turning hub and the universe its outer rim.

Then the lights dimmed from white to yellow and he hurried, with desperate steps, to another window.

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"No! Not so soon! Don't leave me yet!" he sobbed.

The windows closed themselves and the lights went out. He stood on the walk for a long time, staring at the dead embers. A smell of ozone reached his nostrils. He was aware of a blue halo about the dying generators.

He descended and crossed the work area to the ladder he had set against the wall.

Pressing his face against the glass and squinting for a long time he could make out the position of the hands.

"Nine thirty-five, and twenty-one seconds," Carlson read.

"Do you hear that?" he called out, shaking his fist at anything. "Ninety-three seconds! I made you live for ninety-three seconds!"

Then he covered his face against the darkness and was silent.

After a long while he descended the stairway, walked the belt, and moved through the long hallway and out of the Building. As he headed back toward the mountains he promised himself — again — that he would never return.

END

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THE GREAT DOOMED SHIP

BY J. T. McINTOSH

ILLUSTRATED BY GAUGHAN

The ship was enormous, new and unwreckable — and its name was something very like the Titanic!

I

Between Jupiter and Saturn an extra planet orbited lazily. Her movement was eccentric, and as planets went she was tiny, but none of the scores of ships darting out to her from Earth, Venus and Mars, and in from Pluto, Triton, Titania, Dione, Rhea and Titan, had the slightest difficulty in finding her by plain sight, for her surface was silvery, reflecting back 95 per cent of the light which struck her. She was unmistakable — small, sharp, bright, totally unlike any other lamp in the sky.

As planets went she was tiny, but as ships went the *Goliath* was vast. She had, of course, been built in space. Even her sections were too enormous to be constructed on any planet and then hauled groaning into space. All the real construction work had been done by spacesuited ship-builders. Only a few of the most intricate components had been completed on Earth or Mars; even they

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were sometimes so huge that hoisting them into space had been a major problem.

Now after trials the *Goliath* was ready for her maiden voyage. No interplanetary stroll for her: in her trials she had traveled more than twenty light-years. She was designed neither for interplanetary travel nor for the short hops to Alpha Centauri or Sirius. Although she might occasionally condescend to stop off at Procyon, she was designed for *real* travel — Earth to Altair, to Vega, to Arcturus, Capella, even Antares if 14,000 people should ever want to go there at any one time.

She was the fastest, biggest, safest spaceship ever built. But perhaps her name was unfortunate. Perhaps some of the advertising had been unfortunate. For people were connecting her in their minds with another fastest, biggest, safest ship ever built and canceling their bookings.

They were calling her the *Titanic*.

Wilfrid Harkins IV was effusively cooperative, but Jesse Toye was not deceived. The Celle-Harkins director agreed readily on inessentials and demurred on all vital points. This was his long-established method of handling trouble, incipient trouble and potential trouble.

"The *Goliath* will be carrying 14,000 people," Toye said bluntly. "You can't take a shadow of a risk."

"The *Goliath* will be carrying me," said Harkins blandly. "I assure you, Mr. Toye, I have no pretensions to valor. On the other hand, I think I can claim to be comparatively immune to superstition."

Toye, a tall, lean man, had the hard, sharp eyes of a cop. He had been a cop. Now he was with the Accidents Bureau, investigating accidents preferably before they happened. He had caught Harkins in the New York office of Celle-Harkins Lines just before the director left on the last space tender to join the *Goliath*.

"It may be superstition to link the *Goliath* with the *Titanic*," Toye said. "Though your company did ask for it . . . picking that name and running an advertising campaign that was bound to remind people that there had once been another brand-new, perfect, luxurious, unsinkable ship — and make them remember what happened to her. But it's not superstitious to start wondering when the designer of a ship is locked up in an asylum."

"That was certainly most unfortunate," said Harkins, frowning momentarily. "But you must be as well aware as I am, Mr. Toye, that the most brilliant men are not necessarily the most stable. There was no question whatever of Jeremy Solokoff's sanity while he was making his name as a designer or while he was working on the *Goliath*."

"There is now."

"Obviously," said Harkins with some irritation. "But if you know anything whatever about spaceship design you must be aware that it is an eminently practical art. You find no charlatans among space-

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ship designers, Mr. Toye. They are found out altogether too easily. Whatever his condition now, Solokoff was entirely sane while he was working on the *Goliath*. I assume you have not forgotten that there were two designers, and that one of them, like me, will be a passenger on her maiden voyage?"

"*Titanic* again," Toye murmured.

"Pardon?"

"The captain of the *Titanic* had been told he had an unsinkable ship. After the collision with the iceberg, he sent for the designer, who made a brief examination and then told him the ship was going to sink."

"I wish people would forget all about the *Titanic*," said Harkins in an exasperated tone. "After all, it was two hundred years ago — "

"Next week. Another coincidence which makes it difficult to forget."

Harkins, with an effort, smiled pleasantly. "Mr. Toye," he said firmly. "As you are well aware, the *Goliath* is a well designed, fully tested ship. We told nothing but the truth in our advertisements. I am traveling on the ship, the co-designer, Mr. Cuthbert Arkell, is traveling on the ship, and I understand your sister is on the ship too. There's nothing behind the present scare but superstition and rumor."

"And the fact that Solokoff is in an asylum."

"Yes. I would remind you that although nearly a thousand passengers canceled their bookings, their places have very easily been filled. If you had anything to go on, Mr. Toye, anything but rumor and coincidence and — "

Toye stood up. "You would of course cancel the trip."

The statement was slightly ironic. Harkins sidestepped it. "Celle-Harkins is at all times prepared to cooperate to the fullest with the Accidents Bureau," he said smoothly. "But you must admit that all you can produce is merely — "

"Merely a feeling," Toye admitted. "A feeling that the *Goliath* isn't going to reach Vega. Thank you, Mr. Harkins, for letting me take up your time. I very sincerely hope you have a pleasant trip."

When Jesse Toye left the Celle-Harkins building he called the Royerston Clinic again. He was told that Solokoff was still in a coma. He then went to a Communications office and said he wanted to talk to a passenger on the *Goliath*.

The clerk gaped at him. "You don't understand, sir," he gasped. "The ship is some five hundred million miles from here — I'd have to check exactly. Apart from the expense, you couldn't possibly *talk* . . . I mean, it would take nearly an hour for your words to reach the ship, and another hour to get a reply. You could send a message, of course . . . "

Toye showed his Accidents Bureau card. "I want to talk to my sister, Aileen Toye," he said. "Confidentially, I have three reasons. One is that because it's on official business the call isn't going to cost me a cent. The second is that I have an idea I may never get another chance to talk to the kid. The third

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is that the call may actually accomplish something."

The clerk was still doubtful. "It'll still take hours, sir. You'd have to wait nearly two hours for an answer, and if you want to say something more — "

"I know all that, son," said Toye. pleasantly. "How about letting me record my message, and I'll come back in two hours for the answer, huh?"

The clerk led him to a booth with a microphone and he spoke for a few minutes. Having had time to make a few calculations, the clerk was able to tell him to come back in 106 minutes.

Next Toye called on Professor Gobel at the Psi Institute. Gobel looked twenty years older than Toye remembered him, which was not surprising, since it was twenty years since they last met.

Toye cut short the old professor's flow of polite, complimentary reminiscence. "Professor," he said, "I want you to answer two questions for me. First, has there been any really significant breakthrough in the last twenty years?"

Gobel talked for three minutes and said nothing.

"Thank you, professor," Toye said at last, without sarcasm. "You mean no. We're still at the stage of using psi awareness like a blind man using a stick as a probe when he doesn't know how long it is, if it's straight or curved or twisted, if it's rigid or if it bends, if it's always the same or if it's a different stick every time he grasps it."

Gobel smiled sadly. "That's about it, Mr. Toye. But remember what this stick can accomplish. You rated 47 in the scale we used to use for measurement of psi potential, and the only two subjects we've had who exceeded that figure were, unfortunately, morons. You of all people should know — "

"It's helped," Toye admitted. "My hunches are very nearly officially recognized — but hunches still have to be backed by proven facts. My second question, professor: have you studied public reaction to the *Goliath's* maiden voyage, and if so, what do you make of it?"

"Ah." Professor Gobel's dim eyes lighted up. "We're certain here that there is a positive psi reaction against that whole project. In fact, we've been able to test one or two of the passengers who canceled their bookings and found them well above average in psi talent. Developments should be significant — if something happens to the ship, our records will show the considerable value of psi prognostication. If nothing happens, it will be a significant setback."

Toye noticed without surprise or resentment that the fate of 14,000 people and a ship which had cost billions beyond understanding to build meant nothing to the old professor beyond proof or disproof of a theory. Gobel *wanted* the ship to blow up in space. Failure of the ship to destroy itself would be a big disappointment.

"My kid sister is on the ship," Toye said. "Her quotient was 43, wasn't it? Any theory about that?"

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Gobel's face clouded. "Your sister? Aileen? That's strange. Baffling. She, one would think, would know . . . I don't understand it, Mr. Toye. One would certainly expect her to leave the ship."

"She hasn't been very happy lately. That might mean something."

"A death-wish? Surely not!" Gobel shook his gray head sadly. "She's a mere child. And a pretty child."

There was nothing more here for Jesse Toye. He said a few polite things to the old man and then left the Psi Institute. Although it was scarely time yet to return to the Communications office, he went there, had his own message played back to him, and waited.

II

The *Goliath* was not a ship, she was an anthology of ships. Twenty-eight sections each accommodated nearly 500 passengers. The few who remained, the favored few, traveled with the officers in the control unit. Thus crew and passengers mingled by proxy.

Evan Owen, the executive officer, found Aileen in the reading room. "Set that beautiful body in motion," he said. "Somebody wants to talk to you by radio."

Aileen looked up without particular interest. "From Ganymede? Callisto?"

"From Earth," said Owen.

She waited unblinkingly for explanation.

"Same name as yours," said Owen casually. "Toye, Jesse of that ilk. A forgotten, mislaid husband perhaps?"

"You know I'm not married."

"I know that you said you were not married. How come this Toye calls from Earth?"

There was jealousy in his manner, and in hers. They were a couple tied together by love which had gone sour without releasing its grip on either of them.

Owen was a beautiful man of a type distrusted by some women and all men. As a masculine animal he was superb. As an executive officer he was also superb, although no one but Captain Stillman would admit this. Even Stillman didn't like him — but he relied on him.

"He's my brother," said Aileen quietly. "And hadn't I better hurry?"

"No hurry when two-way transmission takes two hours anyway. How come I know nothing about this brother?"

"You and he wouldn't get on."

She stood up. She was, as a rule, a slim, vibrant brunette of 23. At the moment there was a film of fog over her vibrations and she was too thin. She could have passed for 25, which didn't seem so bad if you didn't know that six months ago she was generally estimated to be eighteen.

There was nothing wrong with her except Evan Owen.

Owen went with her to the radio cabin and obviously expected to remain. But when the operator was about to play back Toye's message, she held up her hand and waited until Owen went out. He did so with bad grace.

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"Hi, kid," Toye said. "I'm getting nowhere checking on the *Goliath*. Solokoff hasn't talked — the doctors say he won't. But there's unrest everywhere about the flight. People who have relatives on the *Goliath* are going hysterical and two have shot themselves. Every newspaper that mentions the *Goliath* tells the story of the *Titanic* all over again. It's being pointed out that though the *Goliath's* trials were supposed to be exhaustive, she never exceeded 17 LV and she'll do 70 LV on the Vega run. Celle-Harkins retorts that she couldn't possibly do 70 LV on anything less than the Vega run, and that other ships with the same kind of drive have done 48 LV.

"Listen, kid. You're there on the ship and if the flight smells you can't help sensing it. It smells to me five hundred million miles away. Let's get this straight — Harkins and Arkell and Captain Stillman are all honestly certain there's nothing wrong with the ship or the flight plan. But you've got a psi quotient of 43, and you should *know*.

"If I get the slightest excuse, I'm going to delay the ship's blastoff to give me more time. But all I've got at the moment is that Solokoff has gone nuts. And that's been looked into and declared irrelevant. If you can add anything, let me have it. Good luck, kid. I hope you don't need it."

The radio operator said nothing as he switched of the now silent tape. He seemed like a man good at minding his business.

"I need a few minutes to think," Aileen said. "I'll be back. Okay?"

The operator nodded.

Owen was waiting in the passage. "Not now, Evan," she said. "I have to think."

"Like about getting off this ship before it's too late?"

"Like about that."

He wasn't going to let her go as easily as that, but Captain Stillman appeared and stopped on his way into the radio cabin for a few words with the exec.

Aileen went to the bar and looked long and hard at the sole customer. He was a plump, pale, bald man who drank and drank and looked at nothing and shook.

She left the bar and went to her cabin. She had always thought best in water or under water. When she had a big decision to make she took a bath. This time, not having too much time to spare, she stripped and stood under the shower, gradually turning it to cold.

Owen was a heel and she had known it from the first moment. She had also known from the first moment that any relations she had with him would be temporary and unsatisfactory. Yet somehow she was caught — so enmeshed with a man she loved and despised that she knew her psi talent, such as it was, was smothered. When you were deliberately doing what was morally and logically and emotionally utterly wrong, how could you expect your natural, instinctive perception of what was right for you to go on clicking smoothly?

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She might have managed to break with Owen, but Fate laughed at her and said no. She had to go to Vega because her boss couldn't go and she was the only substitute. And Evan Owen was transferred to the *Goliath* as exec. (The man he replaced refused to go, refused to the point of resigning from the employ of Celle-Harkins Lines.)

Tingling, she stepped from the shower and toweled herself briskly. She was more like Aileen Blanche Toye than she had been for weeks, and she liked the sensation.

There was a tap on her door. In her present mood she felt she could handle Owen and perhaps establish a slight ascendancy; at any rate, she could recover some of the self-respect she had lost.

"Come in," she said.

But it wasn't Owen, it was Captain Stillman. He looked startled and took a step back.

She laughed, not letting him see she had expected someone else. The towel round her was decent, as towels went.

"I just came to say your brother's message was played back to me," he said, not looking at her, "I wanted to ask if I could hear your reply. I'm naturally interested, you know."

"And you think my reply might be worth hearing?" she asked curiously, taking off the cap which had protected her hair.

"Sailors and spacemen have never underrated psi," he said seriously, meeting her gaze. "Even if they don't have the gift themselves."

"Turn round, please," she said, and as he did so, dropped the towel on the floor.

Clem Stillman at thirty was young to be given such responsibility as command of the *Goliath*. Spacemen had to be young; nevertheless, the man responsible for the lives of 14,000 people might be expected to be older than Stillman. He *had* been expected to be older: his age was just one more tiny factor which worried people about this maiden trip.

"You can look now," she said. He turned back, surprised at her quickness; she had pulled on slacks and was carelessly fastening a blouse. He frowned momentarily for no reason that Aileen could make out.

Then they left the stateroom and went to the radio cabin.

Aileen knew now what she wanted to say. She took the microphone, watched by the radio operator and Captain Stillman, and said:

"Hi, Jesse. Frankly I'm a bit mixed up just now and you'd better not attach too much importance to my impressions. You ought to know psi sometimes works and sometimes doesn't. Well, as of now my psi rating is about zero.

"So you're mistaken if you think I should sense anything wrong if there was anything wrong this trip. But you asked me to report. Well, Cuthbert Arkell is drinking as if he wants to drown something. The executive officer on the ship took himself off it and had to be replaced. Those who are left . . . Well, all I can tell you is that there's no *atmosphere* around any mem-

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bers of the crew I've met. Put another way, there's very little psi awareness around.

"Apart from that, and I know it isn't much, there are no facts I can report. I haven't been looking around much and I don't even say hello to any of the other passengers yet. But since you wanted me to try a psi guess, for what it's worth, I've been trying to see myself on Vega and I don't. All the same, I'm certain I'm going to be back on Earth again some time. Sorry, Jesse, that's all I can do for you.

"Don't ask me to drop off this trip, for I can't. There are various reasons . . . remember, I'm a big girl now. 'Bye, Jesse."

She handed the microphone back to the operator. He said nothing. Neither did Stillman. Aileen turned on her heel and went back to her cabin.

III

When Toye got Aileen's answer, which didn't help at all, he went straight to the Royerston Clinic and asked for Dr. Jones.

Dr. Emerson Jones was a white-haired young man who looked as if he didn't believe anything. Professionally, this worked — people were needled into telling him everything to make him believe them.

"*Could* Solokoff talk?" Toye demanded. "Is it possible? I mean, whether he's sane or insane, could he say anything that might make sense?"

"Easily," Jones said. "But he doesn't. Want to see him?"

"Sure," said Toye, surprised. He had previously been refused permission to see Solokoff.

Jones took him to a bare, gray-painted room where a palefaced man of forty-five with a black beard lay in bed motionless, staring blankly at the ceiling. Jones and Toye stood for five minutes and apart from blinking once or twice, more infrequently than any normal person, Solokoff did nothing but breathe slowly and steadily.

"Can I talk to him?" Toye whispered.

"If you like."

"Solokoff," said Toye sharply, "the *Goliath* leaves tomorrow at noon. For Vega."

There was a slight response: Solokoff's breathing seemed to stop for a moment as if he was listening.

Toye repeated what he had said. The black-bearded man's eyes did not move from the ceiling.

Toye and Jones went back to the doctor's room. "There's hatred in him," Toye said thoughtfully. "Powerful hatred."

Jones's lip curled. "Psi?" he said skeptically.

"Partly. I've been around, doctor. You can despise psi if you like. But when it's backed by everything else a detective can use, it can be a very handy tool."

The doctor said nothing.

"Mind if I use your phone?"

"Go ahead."

Toye phoned the Bureau. "I'm convinced there's something shaky about the *Goliath* flight," he told his chief. "Can you get her departure put back forty-eight hours?"

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His chief asked, inevitably, what Toye had to go on, what he hoped to accomplish by the delay.

"Solokoff knows something," Toye said, "and there's such mad hatred in him that I'm certain something's going to blow soon. I believe he knows the *Goliath* leaves tomorrow. I'm certain he knows that once she leaves, there's nothing we can do to stop her or communicate with her. I think there's a chance that once he believes she's gone, once he's sure that nothing can stop her, he'll tell us something. In triumph. As a boast."

The chief said he'd see what he could do.

"You may have something there," Jones admitted.

"You think so, doctor? Why?"

Jones shrugged. Having said all he had to say, he refused to allow himself to be persuaded to say more.

It was a measure of his chief's trust in Jesse Toye that next morning the *Goliath* was requested to postpone her departure for forty-eight hours. Wilfrid Harkins IV arrived at the ship half an hour before the scheduled departure, heard about the embargo, and sent a violent protest to the Accidents Bureau, to the Government, to Jesse Toye, to the newspapers, to everybody else he could think of. Nobody paid any attention.

Toye told Solokoff that the *Goliath* had left. Solokoff sighed, acknowledging receipt of the information, but nothing further happened. Disappointed, Toye left the Clinic. He did not want to hammer home the statement that the *Goliath* was gone or the suggestion that now Solokoff could talk, if there was anything to say. Insistence might give the designer, who had once been brilliant, a hint of the true position.

Everywhere Jesse Toye went newspapermen lay in wait for him, clamoring for a story. Although Toye found this a nuisance, he did his best to satisfy all the reporters, knowing that public disquiet was a weapon he could use.

Facing the facts squarely, he admitted that Celle-Harkins Lines could not be fairly expected to do any more than they had done. It was only his own uneasiness about the *Goliath*, his obsession as others might put it, that drove him to conclude: *if* there's anything wrong, Solokoff is almost sure to be involved, and *if* Solokoff's breakdown is the key factor, probably there's a flaw in the ship, a deliberate flaw that he knows about . . . *that he knows about even now.*

Twenty-four hours after the *Goliath* should have left for Vega, Solokoff had said nothing. Dr. Jones reported that his condition had changed, but was not prepared to commit himself to a description or explanation of the change.

The next day Toye was in his apartment looking at his watch and reckoning that the ship would leave in eighty minutes' time when Jones phoned him.

"Solokoff has talked," Jones said, his voice for once high and excited. "Your reading of the situation was correct. He talked in triumph of

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the destruction of the *Goliath* and everyone aboard. Do you want the details now, or do you want to make other calls right away?"

"Skip the details," said Toye sharply. "I'll call you back. Thanks."

He called his chief. There was still time. It would take some fifty minutes to reach the *Goliath* with a radio message, but over an hour remained of the 48-hour delay he had requested.

A peremptory message was beamed to the *Goliath* postponing her departure indefinitely. But almost at once another message was received.

> *Goliath,* 10.14 *Earth time.*
> Your order postponing our departure for 48 hours was received just 48 hours ago. Presume delay was intended to run from time of receipt of your message. We are already behind schedule and have no desire for further delays. Have requested Captain Stillman to get under way on completion of this transmission.
>
> Harkins.

The *Goliath,* built for multiples of light velocity, had had five hundred million miles and nearly an hour's start on the message forbidding her to leave. She had inertia-conversion — she could attain one light-velocity in a few hours and build up to 70 LV in six weeks. Only such velocities made the Vega run possible in six months.

The message forbidding her to depart might as well have been sent by carrier pigeon.

After that there was little more than academic interest in what Solokoff had said, but the Accidents Board requested it anyway.

The new drive fitted to the ship, the one which was supposed to make vast intergalactic hops possible in a matter of months, was theoretically capable of almost infinite LV values. But Solokoff had seen quite early in its development that over about 60 LV the drive would suddenly go out of phase and attempt to achieve infinite velocity instantaneously.

The results were predictable, and not messy at all. There would be no mess, or anything else.

Solokoff could, he claimed, quite easily have corrected the flaw. He did not say how. It had become, however, a source of great amusement to him to show his models, his calculations and his performance figures to one expert after another and have them all solemnly agree with his conclusions. (If the *Goliath* did blow up with 14,000 people on board, Toye thought venomously, there would be more people to blame than Solokoff and Wilfrid Harkins IV. The latter, of course, wouldn't care. He would be beyond caring.)

As he boasted now in insane triumph, Solokoff seemed to regard as the greatest success of his life the way he had proved himself more expert than the experts, the way he had managed to build a fatal flaw into the *Goliath* despite all the cross-checking.

Paradoxically, what had brought about his mental downfall had been

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recognition. He had for so long known himself to be a giant among minnows, a martyr to the world's blindness and littleness, that the opportunity to work on the *Goliath*, genuine recognition of genuine talent, overbalanced him. He had to go one better than mere success. He had to achieve the success beyond failure beyond success . . .

A reconsideration of his work by experts (now that they had the key) strongly indicated that he had achieved the goal. Some time before reaching the 70 LV scheduled as maximum on the Earth-Vega flight, the *Goliath* would prove that the *Titanic* was not the only safest-ever ship with a built-in flaw.

IV

The second day out Aileen and Owen quarreled violently. This was nothing new.

Most of the work involved in handling a spaceship being around takeoff and landing, all the officers had a good deal of free time in the intervening period. In the case of the *Goliath's* maiden voyage, even at the vast multiples of light-velocity of which she was capable, this was a period of half a year.

So Exec Evan Owen had plenty of time for love and quarrels with Aileen Toye and, she strongly suspected, several other women on the *Goliath*. It was going to be a dreary voyage compounded of brief joy and interminable frustration.

She was sitting moodily in her cabin when someone tapped on the door. "Come in," she called.

For the second time Captain Stillman entered when she expected his exec. He seemed uneasy.

"Miss Toye," he said, "there's two things I want to talk to you about. Only after I've brought up the first you may not be willing to cooperate on the second."

She smiled. "Then why not reverse the order?" she suggested.

"I'd rather not. There are reasons . . . Would you mind coming to my cabin?"

Owen probably wouldn't come near her for hours. "Why not?" she said.

The captain's quarters, as befitted the captain of a ship carrying 14,000 passengers, were slightly more palatial than a movie star's home. However, he led her through the outer palaces to a quite small, comfortable room with two armchairs and a desk, where he evidently spent most of his entirely free time.

Aileen noticed at once the change that came over him when they sat down in this sanctum. In her cabin he had been uneasy, uncertain, boyish. Here he seemed much more like the captain of the largest ship ever built.

"First, Miss Toye," he said, giving her a cigarette and lighting it for her, "I haven't told you until now that I know your brother."

"No," she said, surprised. She wondered why he had not mentioned this at the time of the exchange of radio messages.

"Eleven years ago, when I was a very green ensign, your brother investigated an accident in which I

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was concerned. Before he arrived the chances were that I was going to be blamed entirely and kicked out of the space service. His investigations completely cleared me and even resulted in commendation for me. I've never ceased to be grateful."

"There's no need to feel grateful," she said, smiling. "Jesse would have clobbered you if you'd been at fault. If he got you off, you should have gotten off."

"I know. But that doesn't make any difference. He had to disbelieve all he was told before he could even start helping me. He did that. I've had a great respect for psi talent since he told me that was the thing that really cleared me."

Aileen waited, unable to guess what Stillman was driving at.

He soon put her out of her suspense. "Maybe I'm a busybody, but I don't like to see Jesse Toye's sister making a fool of herself with my exec," he said bluntly.

She chilled instantly. "You are being a busybody," she said coldly. "When I want you to interfere in my affairs, I'll apply in writing."

"Please listen to me for a moment, Miss Toye. You should remember I heard your message to your brother, in which you made it perfectly clear that you were not at all happy. Before that you'd received me in your cabin wearing a towel . . . frankly, the way you acted then didn't seem like your usual style. I could be wrong, but you looked like a nice girl beginning not to care about being a nice girl any more. A girl who likes being a bitch doesn't mind showing it. She doesn't have to be defiant when she throws modesty overboard."

Still talking, he reached over to the tape-recorder on the desk. "You won't want to hear this and I guess I'm a heel to make you, but I think you should hear how Evan Owen talks about you."

Aileen started to get up. Hearing Owen's voice, she subsided again. There was a certain inevitability about this.

She tried to be angry with Stillman, who had deliberately led Owen to talk about her, recording every word. It wasn't a nice thing to do. *But she couldn't help listening.*

Owen was saying things about her which cut because it was he who said them and cut deeper because they were at least half-truths. He was telling Stillman how easy and conventional the conquest of Aileen Toye was. It was boastful stag talk, casually, shockingly obscene. Where women would use innuendo, men used blunt four-letter words. Owen was particularly contemptuous about the way she told him to get out and stay out, and then begged him to come back.

Then, without prompting by Stillman, he was talking about other women, other women on the *Goliath*. He talked about them in much the same way, with casual contempt. Yet he wasn't quite as brutally destructive about any of them as he had been about Aileen.

At last Stillman switched off.

Rather to her surprise, Aileen found herself saying: "I knew all

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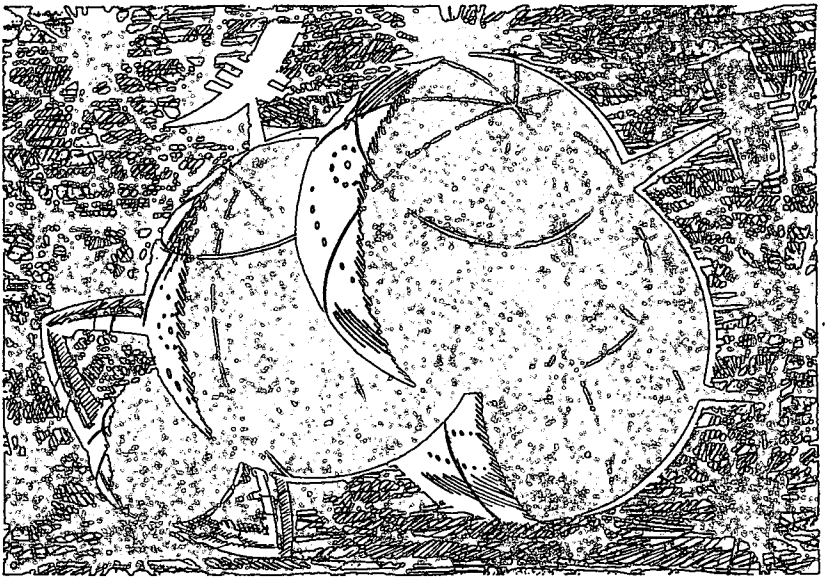

"Why should he think that?"

"He's got good reason to think that. I wanted to wait the full 48 hours your brother requested. Harkins insisted on interpreting the order differently. It made nearly two hours' difference."

"Well, what's two hours in a journey that takes six months?"

"Nothing . . . except that the likeliest time to hear from your brother again was in the last couple of hours. There might have been another postponement. The flight might have been canceled. Anyway, Harkins decided not to risk it. He made me blast off."

"How could he make you? You're the captain, aren't you?"

Stillman shrugged. "But he ap- this perfectly well . . . but now you've made it impossible for me to pretend I don't. Are you satisfied?"

"Is it going to make any difference?" he asked quietly.

"Yes . . . yes, I guess so. I still have some pride. I can't go on with him knowing he's talking about me like that to you, to the radio operator, to the stewards, to everybody who will listen."

Stillman was as impersonally sympathetic as he could manage. "Can I still talk to you about the other thing?"

"Go ahead."

"Like Owen, I was second choice for this job. Mr. Harkins switched me in when Solokoff went of his head. I wasn't quite sure why until just before we left orbit. I know now. He thinks he can keep me under his thumb more than he could an older captain."

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points the captain. And the flight hadn't actually started, which made a difference. He could have dropped me off, appointed Owen captain, and blasted off anyway. Since that wasn't going to help, I did as I was told."

"Well, we're on our way now. If anything happens, it happens. Hadn't we all better just relax?"

"No. I want this ship to reach Vega."

"Don't we all?"

"Giving in to Harkins that one time had a purpose. I'm captain now. Harkins can't give any more orders. Maybe I'll end up on the beach, but for this trip I give the orders. Miss Toye, if your brother feels the way he says he feels — would *you* expect the ship to reach Vega?"

She considered it. "Maybe. You say you respect psi, Captain. Do you know anything? What's your rating?"

"Negligible," he admitted.

"Well, let me tell you a little about psi. It's a mysterious power of divination . . . unfortunately, more mysterious than anything else. Tests which have already definitely established that there's *something* working will be well on the way toward proving that it must be a kind of telepathy — when cases come up that can't possibly be telepathy, because no past or present mind possessed the relevant information. So it could be clairvoyance. You work on that and then you find cases that aren't telepathy or clairvoyance, or anything else. They're just plain nonsense. I once *knew* Jesse was dead. There wasn't the slightest doubt about it. Only it turned out he not only wasn't dead, nothing of any significance happened at the moment of my vision. What did I see? Something that nearly happened? Or something that will happen in about fifty years?"

"But it sometimes works."

"We think, those of us with tall psi talent, that in some sort of way it always works. But when we see something, what are we seeing? Something in somebody's mind? Something that exists somewhere, but not here? Something that will exist sometime? Something that existed ten thousand years ago?"

"Your brother was very certain he saw something."

"Captain, people with psi talent are just as liable to go wrong when they're emotionally involved as anyone else. Jesse was told to check the *Goliath*. He was put on the job when Solokoff went insane. That was three months ago and at the end Jesse had no more than he had at the beginning — the knowledge, for what it was worth, that one of the co-designers of this ship is in an asylum. It probably affected his judgment that I'm on the ship. That he doesn't like Harkins. That he's in a sense responsible for the *Goliath*. That there are 14,000 people on board."

Stillman was silent for a long time. At last he said: "Miss Toye, I remember what you told your brother about your present state of psi awareness. We needn't go into

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that again. But surely, with a rating like yours, you have some sort of idea about your future? About important matters like . . . like . . . "

She smiled, "I know what you mean. Like the man I'll marry, and my children, and so on. It doesn't follow. But I can tell you one thing — I'm going to die when I'm sixty-five."

He jumped convulsively. "You know that?"

"Depends what you mean by *know*. Accept it? Yes, I guess I do. Funny, with life expectation in the high nineties you might think it would be disturbing to know you're going to die at sixty-five. But I'm twenty-three. It seems a long way away. Maybe when I'm sixty I'll wish I didn't know . . . but at the moment it's reassuring to know I'm not going to die in my twenties, or thirties, or forties, or fifties."

"If that's true," Stillman said slowly, "the ship is safe. I don't see how you could live if there's a real disaster. Unless . . . well, unless there was an epidemic or something like that — "

She laughed, remembered she had nothing particular to laugh about, and stopped abruptly. "Why don't you relax, Captain?"

"Because I'm responsible for the *Goliath* ten times as much as your brother is. More than Harkins, more than anybody. Miss Toye, will you do something for me? Cuthbert Arkell is a pleasant, harmless, unhappy man. He likes people to drink with him, even if they only drink orange juice. Will you spend some time with him?"

"It looks," she said bleakly remembering that she could not allow herself to go back to Owen, "as if I'm going to have plenty of time to spend."

V

But she didn't really believe that until the next day. She took a bath after breakfast, trying to get things straight in her mind. The only conclusion she came to, however, was that she needed exercise. Other people put on weight when they did nothing and took it of when they exercised. Aileen tended to eat nothing and grow thin when she was inactive; exercise made her eat and put on weight.

So she selected her snappiest sports outfit, put it on and went to the main gymnasium in the center of the ship.

It was called Central Park, but it was like nothing which had ever existed under open skies. Bright indirect lighting behind blue glass tried to give an impression of spaciousness, not without success — anyone who could feel shut in in Central Park was in a bad way.

There were gardens, arbors, garden seats. There was an artificial beach with sand but no water. There were pitches and courts for all the popular games.

When Aileen arrived she saw Owen playing clock golf with a well-developed blonde in white slacks which were anything but slack and a white halter which completely failed to halt anything. In a few seconds, without words, the

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end of the Aileen-Owen drama was played out.

First Aileen didn't want to be seen, knowing Owen would instantly be at her side. Then, realizing he had seen her and didn't even propose to acknowledge the fact, she was femininely piqued. After a second or two, however, she was able to smile in genuine release. Owen was making it easy for her.

He sensed her mood from fifty yards away and his own attitude abruptly changed. What he had he didn't want; what he couldn't have he desired. He left the busty blonde and strode toward Aileen, who turned at once and talked to two girls completely unknown to her. Fortunately they wanted the necessary third for a game of triposit. She strolled away with them without a glance back over her shoulder.

After the game she felt, paradoxically, rested. She took a cold shower, put on a cocktail dress and found Cuthbert Arkell very easily in the first place she looked.

It was hardly necessary to go through the motions of scraping an acquaintance with him. He was so vague that he was quite prepared to believe he should know her.

"It's a wonderful ship," she said a little later.

He brightened. "Isn't she? I designed her, you know."

She was gratifyingly surprised. "Really? You must be very clever."

For a moment she thought she had overdone it, for he smiled into his glass and said: "No. As a matter of fact, I'm a fool. Probably the biggest fool on the ship."

"How can that be?"

"Oh, I understand spaceship design. I don't understand anything else, that's all."

Patiently she drew him out. His main problem, apparently, was that he still loved the wife who had left him. She was on Vega. But there was also the fact that his son had just been jailed for manslaughter in England and his only daughter had disappeared in South America leaving a trail of broken marriages behind her. She was probably still traceable by the distant popping of champagne bottles, but nobody wanted to trace her any more. Not even poppa.

An hour later Aileen asked a steward if she could see Captain Stillman. He was back in five minutes: she could.

In Stillman's quiet retreat, Aileen said: "As far as I can make out, Arkell's problems are entirely personal. He's got plenty. If you had any ideas that he was drinking because he was uneasy about this ship, forget them."

Stillman sighed. "Thanks, Miss Toye. Excuse my mentioning it, but you look more . . . assured, somehow."

She smiled. "I'll excuse you."

In New York, Jeremy Solokoff was telling his story gleefully for the hundredth time. "It's the multiple LV drive. You know about the multiple LV drive?"

Jesse Toye nodded, but Solokoff wasn't looking. He was in a world of his own. He told the story again, finding acute pleasure in technicali-

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ties which Toye couldn't begin to understand.

When Solokoff stopped for a moment, Toye said harshly: "Yes, you're a genius. You're the cleverest man who ever lived. You won hands down. Now tell me: are you clever enough to think of a way of saving the *Goliath*?"

Solokoff's eyes went blank for a moment. Then they lighted up. "It's the multiple LV drive," he said. "You know about the LV drive? I saw from the very beginning that . . . "

Toye left him sharing his great triumph with the only person worthy of it, himself.

In the passage outside Toye met Dr. Emerson Jones. "Radio waves can't catch the *Goliath*, Mr. Toye," Jones said. "They never could. Looks like a simple case for psi, doesn't it? Radio waves can only do a mere 186,000 miles per second, which is like going backwards. But psi is supposed to be instantaneous, isn't it?"

Toye looked at him, his eyes blazing. Then he spun on his heel and walked away.

Jones was right. If anything was done to save the *Goliath*, it *had* to be psi.

The *Goliath* built up velocity smoothly in the half-world of half-reality beyond the speed of light where normal laws no longer applied. She clicked up more than an extra LV a day.

Mankind needed such velocities to exploit the stars: 14 LV, 17 LV, 22 LV. Short-lived creatures had no use for worlds years away. Years had to be transformed somehow into months and, later, weeks (26 LV, 28 LV, 33 LV.)

Returning gradually to normal, Aileen Toye soon found her recent infatuation for Evan Owen first shameful and then incredible. It horrified her to have to admit to herself that there had never been anything but physical attraction between them. She admitted it to no one else.

Anyway, it was over. Pride had made him try to knock down the wall she had hurriedly thrown up. It proved stronger than he expected, stronger than she expected. Soon, knowing that no wall was necessary any more, she ceased building. And Owen ceased trying to knock the existing wall down. It was pride that had made him try, and it was pride that made him stop trying. His desire for success was a weak, slight thing compared with his dislike and fear of failure.

Besides, of the 14,000 passengers on the whole ship, roughly half were women, fully two thousand youngish women, nearly a thousand attractive women.

A mild flirtation developed between Aileen and Stillman. It remained decorous because Stillman had to be very careful and because Aileen would not be ready for a long time for anything beyond mild flirtations. Now that there was something between them, she never visited him alone in her cabin or he her.

Once or twice she spoke to Wilfrid Harkins IV, who told her

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frankly that the cancellation of the *Goliath's* Vega run would have meant the cancellation of Celle-Harkins Lines.

"Tell your brother that when you get back, Miss Toye," he said. "Conflict of interests was inevitable in the circumstances. Naturally, as he saw it, I should have delayed the flight. The truth was, I knew more than he did and couldn't afford to delay the departure."

"You knew more than he did? About a possible flaw in the *Goliath*?"

"No, about the cancellations." He cut off the end of a cigar and took his time over lighting it. Rich, expensive smoke hung around them.

"You don't have your brother's psi inclinations, Miss Toye?" he said at last.

Since on that understanding he seemed prepared to talk freely, Aileen saw no reason to change it.

"No," she said.

"I thought not. Psi isn't new, but I think with each generation it's becoming more specific. And it's becoming the greatest hazard to the operation of space-lines."

"How?"

"As you know, there are accidents." His tone remained bland, regretful. He was sorry about accidents, yet he fully accepted the necessity of breaking eggs in order to make an omelette. "And as you also know, there are premonitions. People who have booked for a certain flight get premonitions and cancel their booking. Others refuse to book for certain flights. They accept the *Aries* on July 24, seven weeks, second class. They refuse the *Cornwall*, July 15, six weeks, first class at the same fare. And we who operate space lines are in a better position than your brother to know, eventually, whether they were right or not. He doesn't have access to our booking records, you see."

"What do they show?" Aileen asked curiously.

"They show," said Harkins, suddenly waspish, "that premonitions are rarely without foundation — but that as a guide to possible disaster they are totally unreliable."

"How?"

"The *Mozart* was always an unpopular ship. Premonitions made a fog around her. There was constant trouble with the crew, and before every trip last-minute cancellations were heavy. Yet she kept traveling around the galaxy in perfect safety. We changed her name, and it made no difference. She was a jinx ship, a doomed ship. Well, she completed her service as a passenger ship and was sent to Pluto with a mixed cargo. She was called the *Water-Carrier* then."

"Oh!" said Aileen in sudden understanding.

"Sure, she blew up. Her crew was fried to death. A doomed ship in the end. But what about the thousands of psi premonitions? No passenger ever did worse than cut himself shaving on the *Mozart*."

"My brother would be interested. Why keep information like this to yourself?"

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"Because you can't win when you're dealing with harbingers of doom. That story would prove to them that they'd been right all along. That the *Mozart* always was a jinx ship."

Aileen nodded thoughtfully.

"You remember the *Pole Star*? She wasn't ours, but Rex Morris told me, and I believe him, that before she went lost there wasn't a single cancellation, a single psi premonition. So what good are premonitions? The *Henrietta* was another *Mozart*. In the end she crashed on an uncharted wanderer, but not until she was about due for retiral anyway. And the psi warnings started with her maiden trip."

"What was it, then," Aileen said, "that you knew and my brother didn't?"

But Harkins wasn't ready to tell her yet. He had another story that had to be told.

"Premonitions since the dawn of history have often been couched in mystic terms," he said. "On the night of the full moon, when a calf brays three times before dawn — that sort of thing. Even if the psi message really means something, it has to come through a brain that insists on trying to interpret it, on making it sound right. The *Phoenix* was supposed to come to grief 'when fishes fly.' She went round the galaxy for a long time with nothing happening, and who could guess that when she took on a few alien creatures that lived in slime that they were the fishes? When the *Phoenix* was ruptured, some of the crew that got away saw the slimy serpents, frozen stiff, shoot out of the hole and fly on . . . I expect they're flying still."

He blew a lazy gray cloud. "That's how psi works," he said with a chuckle. "Like a true story told backwards."

"What was it," Aileen said patiently, "that you knew and my brother didn't?"

"That something bad will happen to the *Goliath* some day," said Harkins bluntly. "Sure, there's something in premonitions. When we get a run of them like we did with the *Goliath* we know it means something. But it may be twenty-five years before it happens. The *Goliath* may crash on her way to the breakers. What happened didn't seem to me any reason why I shouldn't travel on her maiden trip."

"I guess I see your point of view," Aileen said slowly. "You've been given warning that some day the *Goliath* may come to a violent end. But you've spent billions on her. It's impossible to retire her. I see that."

Harkins smiled at her. "You're an intelligent young woman, Miss Toye. It's been a great pleasure to talk to you."

VI

As the *Goliath* built up to 36 LV, to 40 LV, to 45 LV, she thrust before her a feeble jet of nebulous matter which, at anything less than light velocity, would have been without imaginable purpose. At the *Goliath's* speed, however, it was an extremely efficient cow-catcher.

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Evan Owen still devoted his free time to dark, vicious shipboard romances. Cuthbert Arkell attempted, unsuccessfully, to drink the cellars dry and drown the guilt which only he felt. Aileen and Captain Stillman got to know each other better and liked what they learned. Wilfrid Harkins IV was writing his autobiography. It was only the opportunity of doing this which had induced him to go to Vega instead of sending someone else.

And on Earth, Jesse Toye bust a mental gut trying to get something across to Aileen. He knew in his heart he was not succeeding. It was like shouting down a bottomless well.

Solokoff died in convulsions, his triumph suspending itself long enough for him to die.

The Accident Bureau file on the case was complete, from the Earth angle. Celle-Harkins Lines were not publicly pilloried, yet. Before there was a murder trial there had to be a body. In this case, fourteen thousand bodies.

If and when they materialized, Celle-Harkins would be added to the pile. What the Bureau had on the company was enough: the fact that the flight could and should have been stopped in time if the *Goliath* had obeyed orders.

The *Titanic* had not quite dropped out of public interest. But since it would be more than a year before it would be known on Earth whether the *Goliath* had arrived in Vega safely or not, the references to the ship were few and far between.

On the *Goliath,* which had just accelerated beyond 54 LV, Stillman said to Aileen: "I don't know what to make of it any more. I trust your brother and I trust psi. Maybe most of the passengers who had high psi ratings have dropped out and those who are left are all as blind and deaf psionically as I am. But if there was something wrong, *you* ought to feel it. You couldn't go on believing you'll die at the age of 65."

Aileen nodded. "Despite what Harkins says, I think so too. I've had plenty of experience of psi, Clem. It always existed in the form of feelings, intuition, hunches, but it *has* been becoming more specific . . . "

"You've had premonitions that proved right?"

"Not as premonitions usually. When I was fifteen, eleven of us piled into two cars. I was in one of them when I saw that the boy I was interested in at the time was in the other with a little redhead who was trying to get her claws into him. That was why I shifted . . . The car I'd been in shot off the shoulder of a hill and all the kids in it were killed."

"Coincidence?"

"Oh, sure. Another time I was to fly to Florida with two girl friends. I got sick and none of us went. The plane crashed. Coincidence again, of course. When I went to collect a new car there was a choice of a green one or a red. I like green and hate red — but I took the red. Later I heard there was a fault in the steering of the green car. It hit a truck."

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"You don't really believe it's coincidence at all, do you?"

She smiled. "No. It's happened too often too conclusively."

"Yet you don't feel a thing about this trip?"

"Not a thing. I never have." She hesitated and then said: "At the beginning, as you heard me tell Jesse, what I felt or didn't feel meant nothing either way. But I'm all right now."

"So I can forget the whole thing?"

She shrugged, and then suddenly shivered. "Unless I somehow survive and everybody else gets killed . . . that's still possible, you know. I should have told you about another time — another car smash. It was a taxi. There was no feeling, no premonition of any kind. Two people killed, three were badly injured, but I didn't have a scratch. Psi warnings are very selfish."

"Your brother's wasn't. He's not on the ship, yet he — "

"No, but he's involved. That time, I wasn't. The two who were killed were nothing to me. I didn't even know their names."

"You can't be saved if anything serious happens to the *Goliath*," Stillman said decisively. "So I guess we should trust you and stop worrying."

"I guess so." She yawned. "Think I'll turn in, Clem."

She stood up, swayed, and clutched at the back of a chair.

"Anything wrong?" said Stillman.

"No, nothing."

She walked steadily to her cabin. Inside she had another dizzy turn. She frowned. The last alcoholic drink she had had was a gin fuzz three days before. She had taken no drugs.

Suddenly she wanted very much to be in bed. It looked solid, secure and infinitely comfortable. She wanted to get into bed and never get up again.

She plucked at her dress. The buttons jumped from under her fingers. She managed to get it off without unfastening the buttons. Then she was startled to see how far away the bed was.

Two steps she managed. But the third was too much. The room twisted about her and she collapsed in a heap on the floor.

"I can't find a thing," said Dr. Richter positively. "Not a damned thing."

He was young, or he wouldn't have been so positive. Young doctors know everything. If they can't find a bug, the illness is psychosomatic. No possible doubt whatever.

Aileen lay in bed, pale and beautiful and unmoving. If her breast was rising and falling under the thin sheets, no sign of the movement showed.

"But she was all right a few hours ago," Stillman insisted.

The young doctor shrugged. A battle could be won and lost, and a thousand lives could be extinguished, in far less time than a few hours. Medically as well as historically, a few hours could be an eternity.

Richter thought of something. "Superficially she's rather like the others," he said casually. It was just worth mentioning.

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"What others?"

"A few of the passengers. A dozen or so. Of course, this is so much greater in degree it seems like a difference in kind. The others only — "

"When did they start?" Stillman said sharply.

Richter smiled and quoted: "Within the last few hours."

"Is there any chance that the others are psi positives?"

The doctor looked shocked, as if the Captain had suddenly spat on the unconscious girl. With a faint smile he said: "We don't enter psi potential on patients' records. We don't even ask if they're Christians any more."

"Tell me one thing, doctor. This coma, whatever it is — is it serious?"

Richter couldn't help smiling, though he wiped it off at once: "One can only guess, of course. But I should say the young lady is dying."

"Dying? But she can't — "

Richter's tone put Stillman firmly in his place. Stillman might be the captain of the ship, but he was medically quite unqualified.

"Captain, every heart-beat is weaker than the last. Miss Toye's hold on life is a single thread."

Stillman whispered to himself, not to the doctor: "But she *knew* she wouldn't die until she was sixty-five. Until sixty-five . . . "

Suddenly he spun away from the bed, clawed open the door, and dashed along corridors, ignoring stares. He burst into the main control-room.

The fifth officer looked up, surprised. "Meredith," Stillman gasped. "What is our present velocity?"

"It's 63 EV, sir."

"Hold it there," Stillman snapped. "No further acceleration. Standing orders are that the figure of 63 LV is not to be exceeded under any conditions. It may be necessary to decelerate . . . Meredith, if anyone attempts to start acceleration again, it's mutiny. Understand that?"

"Yes, sir," said Meredih dazedly.

"If Wilfrid Harkins IV himself asks you to — "

"If Wilfrid Harkins IV himself asks him to do what?" said a suave voice behind Stillman. "Captain, are you proposing to emulate Jeremy Solokoff? You rushed past me just now as if — "

"Mr. Harkins, you have no right to set foot in the control-room of this ship. You will not do so again. That's an order, do all of you understand?"

He seized Harkin's plump arm and dragged him, protesting angrily, to Aileen Toye's cabin.

Dr. Richter was still there. He was surprised and hurt. "In the last few minutes there has been a most astonishing change, Captain Stillman. The patient . . . the psychosomatic illness seems to have reached a crisis, and she appears to be rapidly recovering." Obviously he very cordially wished he had not been so definite about the seriousness of Aileen's condition so recently.

Stillman breathed his relief. Turn-

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ing to Harkins, he said quite calmly: "The ship will not accelerate beyond 63 LV, Mr. Harkins. I have given orders to that effect. When you're calmer I may attempt an explanation, but . . . no, on second thoughts I don't think I will."

"I am perfectly calm," Harkins roared. "But you are talking nonsense, Stillman! The figure of 70 LV is necessary if the *Goliath* is to complete her first trip on schedule."

"Then she's not going to complete it on schedule, Mr. Harkins. If we attempted 70 LV according to plan, this ship wouldn't complete her first trip at all."

Harkins calmed abruptly. "You've found out something?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid I can't explain it to you. Not until there is confirmation from another source. You'll get it if you're patient."

Harkins, who was not an unreasonable man, was patient and eventually he did get it. He proved more than understanding — then.

But as Stillman said to Aileen as soon as she was well enough to go looking for dark corners where even a captain could safely do a bit of necking: "How could I tell him that I've pegged the ship's acceleration because you *knew* you were going to die at 65 — not 65 years, but 65 LV?"

END

Coming . . . Tomorrow!

Avram Davidson, known to fame as editor of our amiable competitor, *F&SF*, and as the author of a number of witty and informed stories in science fiction and related areas, now sets out to carve himself a new reputation in a field that sorely needs new and good practitioners. In the next issue of *Worlds of Tomorrow* we present a new Avram Davidson, making his bow with the kind of wild and wonderful science-fiction-adventure story that we've all missed. The name of the story is *Valentine's Planet* . . . a complete-in-one-issue novel, and one of the best we've had!

In the same issue we offer Philip K. Dick's novelette, *The Little Black Box*, and a funny and enjoyable yarn by Allen Kim Lang called *The Day of the Egg*. The Lang story, you may have noticed, was originally planned for the last issue but squeezed out at the last of all possible moments — so late that the title was still on the cover as we went to press. Our apologies! But it'll be here next time — and we think it was worth waiting for.

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THE REALIZED MAN

BY NORMAN SPINRAD

His task was to conquer the planet — and never let it know it was conquered!

Derek Carmody stood for a moment on the edge of the savannah. He looked back over his shoulder, over the waving sea of tall, red grass, at the ship, a gleaming anachronism in this primeval world.

A small portion of his brain, monitoring his artificially regulated heartbeat told him — sixty-seven minutes since he had left the ship.

He gave the ship a final glance, and plunged into the jungle.

It was a fresh world, this planet of jungle, savannah and broad empty plains. Fresh and young and new. The little village was a full five miles off, deep in the jungle.

Carmody inhaled the wet, sultry jungle air. He felt happy and unencumbered. We've come a long way, he thought. Fifty years ago, we'd've brought the ship down right by the village as soon as we spotted it, burning away a square mile or two of jungle, and not giving a damn. We'd've stomped around, armed to the teeth with energy

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screens, robots, tractors. Man has come a long way.

And now, back to the old ways.

Derek took one final look at the red sun and noted the length and direction of the shadows. The hypno-trained section of his brain that served as his compass integrated these factors and set a course for the little village in the jungle that the ship had spotted from the air.

Carmody strode silently, deeper into the jungle, threading his way among the trunks of the great trees. He was a tall man, and muscular. His red hair was cropped close around his skull. He wore simple coveralls and plain boots. No pack weighed down his steps, and his large, strong hands were empty.

This is the way to explore a new world, he thought, the *best* way. Man, alone, unencumbered, depending on no delicate gadgets that can fail. Man, alone, armed only with the hyper-developed mind and body that the Institute had given him.

Noises filtered through the vine-choked trees. Carmody listened. There was nothing dangerous in the sounds, no heavy footfalls, no flap of great wings.

A week he would spend alone, in the jungle. A day to reach the village, five days to learn what he could, a day to come back.

Time enough, for a Realized Man.

When did that term first come into use? he wondered. From that very first day at the Institute school, he had learned to think of himself as a Realized Man.

"You're here to become Realized Men," the instructor had barked. "Half of you won't make it. The rest of you, when you graduate, you're gonna be a race apart. Your mouth will be a chemical laboratory. Your brain will be a clock, a compass, a balance. Your body will be a finely tuned instrument, a weapon. Remember that, recruits! When you go out to explore the planets, it'll be your *only* weapon."

And now, here he was, Derek Carmody, Realized Man, survey explorer on his first assignment, walking through an unknown jungle on a nameless world toward a village Man had never seen.

It felt good.

The jungle closed in around him. Now the sun was obscured by a ceiling of broad, green leaves. It might be days before he saw the sun again, but it didn't matter. The "gyroscopic compass" in his brain had been set, and direction was something he would simply *know*.

It occured to him that he was getting hungry. As he walked, he scanned the vegetation. The trees looked unpromising — their trunks were bare up to about twenty feet, and above that were only the green leaves.

He picked some blue berries off a short red bush. He pulped one with his fingers, put a tiny drop on his tongue, diluted it with saliva and swallowed.

Citric acid . . . vitamin B . . . dextrose . . . traces of protein . . . Oh, oh! Cyanide! Not very much, but enough.

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Carmody frowned. Mark the blue berries *poison*. Oh well, there's plenty of other stuff in the jungle. Sooner or later, something will test out.

If not. . . . Carmody did not like the thought. If he didn't find something edible, he would have to go into a Fast-Trance for a week. That would be a nuisance. It would mean he'd be weak as a kitten for ten days, when he got back.

He spied a green, bulbous fruit growing from a ground-creeping vine, like a watermelon but much smaller. He smashed it, put a drop on his tongue, salivated and swallowed.

Thiamin . . . dextrose . . . *more* than a trace of protein . . . The analytical centers in his brain went down the entire list. It was safe. Not only that, thought Carmody, it doesn't taste bad either.

He picked another fruit and ate it. He felt satisfied.

Suddenly he froze. That was a heavy sound. He commanded his adrenals. Adrenalin coursed through his arteries. He began the preliminaries for summoning Hysterical Reaction.

The sound was moving in his direction. Closer . . . closer . . . .

A six-legged, red-maned beast burst through the jungle in front of him. It was about the size of a large dog, and its small head was mostly fanged mouth.

It spotted Carmody. With a deep bellow, it sprang.

Faster than a man has a right to move, Carmody sidestepped, caught the beast in mid-leap, snapped its neck and flung it down.

He sat down next to the carcass. His lungs inhaled deeply and he stopped the flow of adrenalin as he went through the Hysterical Reaction Withdrawal Routine.

Interesting, he thought. Wonder if I should take the time to . . .? He prodded the dead animal. It wasn't worth the trouble to try and eat it. Too sinewy.

Well one thing, thought Carmody, as he continued on his way, no sleep for old Derek in *this* jungle! Might as well go into Sleepless Trance right now.

Commands went out from his cerebrum to his thalamus, to his endocrine system, to his sleep center. Not until they were reversed would he sleep.

All through the night Carmody traveled on, following the compass in his brain. When it became too dark to see normally, he bypassed the blank reflex, widened his pupils to maximum expansion and routed extra blood to the area of his eyes. Specially sensitized patches of skin on his forehead became infra-red detectors.

Three times he was forced to kill one of the six-legged creatures, and once he was attacked by a python-like constricting snake.

The snake had grabbed him from a low-lying limb, unaware, and before he had time to go into Hysterical Reaction it had buried its fangs in his arm. Quickly he summoned Hysterical Strength, and smashed the constrictor's skull.

But, he noticed, his arm had been torn. Cursing his carelessness, he

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went into Curative Trance. The blood stopped flowing, and slowly the flesh knit together. Even so, it took a full ten minutes.

Damn stupidity! He thought.

Morning found him at the edge of a small clearing in the jungle. He checked the position of the sun, and his heart-beat-counting sense told him the elapsed time.

The village would not be far off. A few hundred yards to the south. He breakfasted on one of the green fruits. No sense in taking the time to test anything else now.

Now, he knew, would come the dangerous part. A Realized Man was a match for most animals. Fully integrated and realized intelligence and sinew was always superior to strength alone.

But intelligent life.... Sentient beings could be *anything*, could have *any* powers. Muscle alone was blind, predictable, finite. But intelligence knows no limits.

This was what the years of training in the Institute were for. This was the reason for the development of the Realized Man. *First Contact.*

In the past, it had been done by men armed with blasters, robots, gadgetry. The natives were always impressed, because they were faced with something totally beyond their comprehension. But with this sense of alienness came fear, and with fear, frustration, and with frustration, hostility. It had meant misunderstandings. It had meant killing.

Hence the Realized Men. Although the Realized Men bristled with hidden powers, although to the native's eyes they were certainly aliens, they were trailed by no metallic retinue. They strode quietly into villages, alone, comparatively unobtrusive, with only the clothing on their backs.

Clearly they were strange, but just as clearly, they were part of the natural scheme of things, not unnatural things, half flesh, half metal.

They might be superior beings, but even the most primitive natives could see that they were creatures of life and protoplasm, not demons.

Carmody moved slowly through the jungle now, slowly and cautiously.

Soon he came upon a second, larger clearing. In the clearing were fifteen crude thatched huts. A small stream ran through the village.

The natives were large, perhaps seven feet tall on the average, and they were upright bipeds. From each shoulder grew two arms, both ending in seven-fingered hands. The natives were covered with a short, soft, red down, except for their surprisingly humanoid faces. Some of them wore simple skirts of animal skins. Some were naked.

Carmody could see that several of them carried spears.

A burly native hunched over a spitted animal, roasting over a wood fire. Watching him approvingly was an unusually large *man* (try to think of them as *men,* Carmody told himself), who, from his headdress of blue feathers and bones, Carmody took to be the chief.

He prepared himself for entering

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the village. Adrenalin coursed through his arteries. He went through the Hysterical Reaction preliminaries, making ready to summon the Reaction instantly. He autohypnotized himself, commanding utter calmness, speeding up his reflexes, readying his mind and body.

Carmody stepped into the clearing, his palms upward, in the universal sign of peace.

"V'rolo!" shouted the native by the roast, bolting to his feet. "V'rolo Krashna, v'rolo!"

"V'rolo!" shouted the chief, spotting Carmody. His red eyes flashed with some unknown emotion.

Natives were gathering by the fire.

"V'rolo, v'rolo!" they shouted.

"V'rolo, Krashna, v'rolo!"

Carmody didn't like the sound of it. It was clearly some sort of supplication to the chief, and it had a hostile sound.

The chief rose to his full seven and a half feet. Each of his four arms was as thick as Carmody's thigh.

Carmody stood still, his palms open in the sign of peace.

"V'rolo," said the chief. "Krashna v'rolo. Krashna kra ya v'rolo."

Carmody tensed himself. He summoned full Hysterical Reaction.

The chief charged, his four mighty arms outstretched, to grab Carmody in a deadly bear hug.

Carmody sidestepped easily. He grabbed the chief by the neck and crotch and lifted the four-hundred-pound bulk over his head.

"Ta'dash!" roared the natives. "Ta'dash v'rolo Krashna!"

Carmody slammed the chief to the ground and stood over him. He hope that the chief had learned his lesson.

But the chief's four hands shot out, each pair grabbing an ankle, and pulled Carmody to the ground. The big native sank his teeth into Carmody's leg.

So it's a fight to the death, thought Carmody. He flipped himself upright and slammed the side of his hand into the chief's huge neck. There was a compression of muscle, and then a crack of bone. The chief's jaws relaxed.

Carmody rose warily to his feet. Would he ever know the reason for the attack? He did not think so. He glanced at his leg. The blood had stopped flowing, but it was a deep wound. As he went into Curative Trance the flesh began to close, but it would take days for the scar to disappear.

He eyed the circle of natives warily, but they made no hostile move.

A stooped old one pointed to Derek "Ta'hash v'rolo Krashna," he said. "Krashna ga K'dan. Ta'dash ya ta K'dan."

"Ta'dash ya ta K'dan," the natives agreed.

Obviously the dead one had been the chief, thought Carmody. The K'dan. V'rolo means "kill" or "dead" or probably both. I must be *Ta 'dash*, whatever that means.

"Ta'dash ya ta K'dan," said the old one. He lifted the headdress of bones and feathers off the head

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of the dead chief, and placed it on Carmody's.

"Ta'dash ya K'dan!" shouted the natives.

Oh no! thought Carmody. They've made me chief. And I don't speak a word of the language. How am I—?

"Moota, Ta'dash?" asked the old one. "Moota, K'dan?"

Apparently they're asking me my name, thought Carmody. Let's see.

He pointed to the dead chief. "Moota Krashna?" he asked.

"Za!" answered the natives, obviously meaning yes.

Carmody pointed to himself. "Moota Derek," he said.

"Derek! Ta'dash moota Derek. Derek ya K'dan."

At least I'm communicating, Carmody thought. *V'rolo*—kill. *K'dan*—chief. *Moota*—name. *za*—yes. *Ta'dash*—?....

An idea was forming in the back of his mind.

The primary, long-range goal of Survey was to obtain living space. There were several difficulties involved. Any planet that was worth colonizing usually had intelligent life. In the past, this had meant wars of conquest, even of extermination. But now Man was older and, it was hoped, wiser. Rules had been set up. Planets would only be colonized as a result of treaties with the natives, with natives who were advanced enough to know what the treaties meant.

Planets like this....Well, Man had learned to take the long view. Some day this planet would be advanced enough to sign a treaty of colonization—perhaps hundreds, perhaps thousands of years from now.

Whether the natives would be inclined to sign such a treaty at that far-distant date largely depended on what Derek Carmody did now.

They've made me chief, he thought. Okay, I'll go along with it.

"Derek ya K'dan," he said.

Carmody spent the next two days studying the natives.

It was a simple culture, not yet past the stone age. Fire was known, the ax and spear had been invented. There seemed to be no religion, and the language was rudimentary and undeclined.

The natives hunted—the six-legged beasts, a small pig-like animal, a large, flightless bird. And they had begun to explore agriculture, to the extent of clearing weeds away from the more desirable plants.

A young culture, thought Carmody. In perhaps a thousand years, they would be ready to sign a colonization treaty with the Solar Government.

Such treaties were always mutually advantageous. Sol got land, and the undeveloped planet got technology and eventually space travel.

Yes, it was mutually advantageous, partly because Man had a monstrous racial guilt complex from his imperialistic past, partly because it made good business sense.

But too many planets refused to sign. The reason was almost always irrational—the intense xenophobia

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that seemed characteristic of intelligence everywhere.

Here though was a planet in its infancy. Here was an opportunity to pre-condition a race into accepting a treaty when the time came.

It was a two-fold task: first, to imbue the village with positive feelings toward men; second, to make sure this feeling spread and conquered.

It was long-range planning of the kind Man never would have attempted a bare hundred years ago. Now it was in the hands of Derek Carmody.

Carmody sat in front of the chief's hut, nibbling on a haunch of meat that had been cooked for him.

The first task is the easier one, he thought. Already I'm the chief. The step to a god isn't that big. And for a Realized Man . . .

But how to make sure this village spreads the new faith?

Let's see now, in Terran mythology Prometheus brought fire to Man and Man worshipped him. But these people already have fire.

Carmody wiped his lips with a leaf. Yes, he thought, but that's on the right track. What I need to do is introduce an advance that will make them remember two-armed bipeds with a sense of grateful awe. And if it's important enough, it should make this village dominant in this jungle, and later make this jungle dominate other jungles.

But what?

It has to be something they can understand, something they can copy.

Giving 'em blasters would be ridiculous. Besides, I couldn't do it. It has to be something I can make with my bare hands or with a flint knife.

At that moment he could vividly understand the wisdom of the Realized Man system of exploration. He could give them nothing he could not make himself. He could not drastically upset the balance, even if he wanted to.

But *what?* Fire they have. Spears. Axes . . .

Suddenly it hit him. He darted into the hut, and came out carrying a stone ax, a flint knife, leather thongs and several spear heads. With these he disappeared into the jungle, under the apprehensive eyes of his subjects.

It was afternoon when Carmody returned. The natives had gathered around his hut in his absence. Apparently they had been worried that he would not come back.

He dumped the pile of wood that he was carrying in front of the hut, and sat down.

The natives were watching him intently. Good.

Carmody picked up a small stick, about two feet long. He cut notches in both ends with the flint knife and inserted a spearhead in one of the notches, securing it with leather thonging.

The natives appeared to understand. Derek, the new K'dan, had made a spear — albeit a ridiculously puny one.

Carmody picked up a longer stick, a green tree limb over four feet long painstakingly carved with

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a flint ax so that its ends were thinner than its middle. He cut notches in both ends.

He then took a length of thong and tied it to one end of the limb, using the notch to secure it. He held out his work, to make sure the natives understood.

He stood up, and planted the end of the limb with the thong attached firmly on the ground. He leaned heavily on the other end. The limb bent.

Quickly he tied the other end of the thong in the second notch. And he held up the first bow that the planet had ever seen.

Murmurs swept through the natives. Was their strange new chief mad? What was this thing he had made?

Carmody picked up the arrow and fitted it to the bowstring. He pointed to the trunk of a tree, about thirty yards away, pulled back the bowstring and let it go.

There were gasps of astonishment as the arrow stuck in the tree. No one could effectively throw a spear *that* far.

Under the now-admiring eyes of the natives, Carmody made another arrow. With some difficulty, he pantomimed orders for the natives to follow suit.

Their arrows were neater. They had more experience making spears.

The natives spent the next hour trying out the bow. Carmody smiled. They were taking to it! Now came the critical point.

He motioned for his subjects to gather around him. He handed out thongs, bow-limbs and flint knives to three natives. He picked up a fourth set.

He notched the ends of his second bow. Immediately, one of the natives copied his action.

There's the next chief! he thought.

The other two caught on to the idea. Carmody strung his bow. After a few minutes of fumbling, the natives had completed theirs.

Carmody picked up an arrow and fitted it to his bow. The three natives, still mechanically copying their *K'dan*, followed suit.

Carmody let his arrow fly.

When the natives' arrows took wing also, a roar of elation swept the village. Archery had come to a new planet.

The next night the hunters brought back more game than they ever had before. As they carried the carcasses back into the village, Carmody grinned in satisfaction.

Now there would be more time for the embryo agriculture, which in the long run would mean more time for thought, for exploring, for expansion. Some day this village would be a city, the seat of a mighty empire. The bow would give them a big head start on their neighbors.

What was needed now was a dramatic exit so that the natives would carry and spread the story of the two-armed god who had brought them the bow. The legend would spread and diffuse, so that a thousand years later, when the ships of Sol returned, the humans would be treated as demi-gods, not as demons.

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But an exit! Carmody frowned. It would have to be big . . .

Let's see, one hunter was killed in the jungle. They had burned his body, a common enough practice . . .

Sure, why not! Resurrection through fire! He could do it! For a Realized Man, it would be easy.

Carmody strode out into the firelight, where the natives hunkered around several roasting carcasses. Tonight there would be a feast. Tonight too, he thought wryly, the new *K'dan* would "die".

Tomorrow, he would be resurrected, the planet's first god. Derek strode into the center of the natives. They grinned at him in the firelight. Derek was the best K'dan the tribe had ever had. The new weapon was amazing, it brought such an abundance of meat! And later it would bring . . .

It was not hard for Carmody to read their faces. After all, he thought, the idea of an "ultimate weapon" is purely relative.

When he was sure all eyes were upon him, he ceremoniously removed the headdress of bones and blue feathers, and placed it on the head of the native he had chosen.

"K'dan!" he said. "Ya ta K'dan. Derek . . . ." His vocabulary was inadequate. So, he suspected, was the language.

"Derek —" He pointed to the sky.

Then he calmly laid himself down on the ground. He autohypnotized himself into the Trance of Suspended Animation, a technique far older than the Institute of Realized Men, older even than spaceflight itself, as old as the yoga from which many of the modern autohypnotic techniques had evolved.

His heart slowed down to one beat an hour. The flow of his blood became imperceptible. He slept deeply. To all but a rigorous scientific examination, Derek Carmody was dead.

The natives stood about in confused awe. Finally, the newly appointed *K'dan* put his ear to Derek's chest. There was no sound. He put his face to Derek's. No breath.

"V'rolo,"" he said quietly. "Derek v'rolo!"

All that night the natives kept vigil over the body of Derek Carmody. In the morning they built a beir of wood. It was the largest and most elaborate bier they had ever made.

They placed Carmody on the woodpile and made one final check, to make sure he was dead.

Then flint struck flint, and the wood was ignited.

As the flames rose to envelope Carmody, the heat triggered the autohypnotic key he had implanted.

The Trance of Suspended Animation was broken. Instantly it was replaced by Hysterical Reaction, the abnormal condition of mind and body which had enabled Indian fakirs to walk on fire.

Slowly, deliberately, Derek Carmody rose up off his funeral pyre.

"Derek!" screamed the natives. "Derek ga v'rolo!"

He strode rapidly through the jungle. He walked like a god.

END

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WHAT THE DEAD MEN SAY

BY PHILIP K. DICK

ILLUSTRATED BY FINLAY

They said he couldn't take it with him. But how could he be sure until he tried?

I

The body of Louis Sarapis, in a transparent plastic shatter-proof case, had lain on display for one week, exciting a continual response from the public. Distended lines filed past with the customary sniffling, pinched faces and the regular quota of distraught elderly ladies in black cloth coats.

In a corner of the large auditorium in which the casket reposed, Johnny Barefoot impatiently waited for his chance at Sarapis' body. He did not intend merely to view it. His job, detailed in Sarapis' will, lay in another direction entirely. As Sarapis' public relations manager, his job was — simply — to bring Louis Sarapis back to life.

"Keeerum," Barefoot murmured

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to himself, examining his wristwatch and discovering that two more hours had to pass before the auditorium doors could be finally closed. He felt hungry. And the chill issuing from the quick-pack envelope surrounding the casket increased his discomfort minute by minute.

His wife Sarah Belle approached him with a thermos of hot coffee. "Here, Johnny." She reached up and brushed the black, shiny Chiricahua hair back from his forehead. "You don't look so good."

"No," he agreed. "This is too much for me. I didn't care for him much when he was alive — I certainly don't like him any better this way." He jerked his head at the casket and the double line of mourners.

Sarah Belle said softly, "Nil nisi bonum."

He glowered at her, not sure of what she had said. Some foreign language, no doubt. Sarah Belle had a college degree.

"To quote Thumper Rabbit," Sarah Belle said, smiling gently, " 'If you can't say nothing good, don't say nothing at all.' " She added, "From *Bambi,* an old film classic. If you attended the lectures at the Museum of Modern Art with me every Monday night — "

"Listen," Johnny Barefoot said desperately, "*I* don't want to bring the old crook back to life, Sarah Belle. How'd I get myself into this? I thought sure when the embolism dropped him like a cement block it meant I could kiss the whole business goodbye forever." But it hadn't quite worked out that way.

"Unplug him," Sarah Belle said. "W-what?"

She laughed. "Are you afraid to? Unplug the quick-pack power source and he'll warm up. And no resurrection, right?" Her blue-gray eyes danced with amusement. "Scared of him, I guess. Poor Johnny." She patted him on the arm. "I should divorce you. But I won't; you need a mama to take care of you."

"It's wrong," he said. "Louis is completely helpless, lying there in the casket. It would be — unmanly to unplug him."

Sarah Belle said quietly, "But some day, sooner or later, you'll have to confront him, Johnny. And when he's in half-life you'll have the advantage. So it will be a good time. You might even come out of it intact." Turning, she trotted off, hands thrust deep in her coat pockets because of the chill.

Gloomily, Johnny lit a cigarette and leaned against the wall behind him. His wife was right, of course. A half-lifer was no match, in direct physical tete-a-tete, for a living person. And yet — he still shrank from it, because ever since childhood he had been in awe of Louis, who had dominated 3-4 shipping, the Earth to Mars commercial routes, as if he were a model rocketship enthusiast pushing miniatures over a papier-maché board in his basement. And now, at his death, at seventy years of age, the old man through Wilhelmina Securities controlled a hundred industries on both planets. His net worth could not be calculated, even for tax purposes. It

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was not wise, in fact, to try, even for Government tax experts.

It's my kids, Johnny thought; I'm thinking about them, in school back in Oklahoma.

To tangle with old Louis would be okay if he wasn't a family man. Nothing meant more to him than the two little girls and of course Sarah Belle, too. I got to think of them, not myself, he told himself now as he waited for the opportunity to remove the body from the casket in accordance with the old man's detailed instructions. Let's see. He's probably got about a year in total half-life time, and he'll want it divided up strategically, like at the end of each fiscal year. He'll probably proportion it out over two decades — a month here and there, then toward the end, as he runs out, maybe just a week. And then — days.

And finally old Louis would be down to a couple of hours; the signal would be weak, the dim spark of electrical activity hovering in the frozen brain cells would flicker, the words from the amplifying equipment would fade, grow indistinct. And then silence. At last the grave. But that might be twenty-five years from now; it would be the year 2100 before the old man's cephalic processes ceased entirely.

Johnny Barefoot, smoking his cigarette rapidly, thought back to the day he had slouched anxiously about the personnel office of Archimedean Enterprises, mumbling to the girl at the desk that he wanted a job; he had some brilliant ideas that were for sale, ideas that would help unangle the knot of strikes, the sabotage violence growing out of jurisdictional overlapping by rival unions — ideas that would, in essence, free Sarapis of having to rely on union labor at all. It was a dirty scheme, and he had known it then, but he had been right. It was worth money. The girl had sent him on to Mr. Pershing, the Personnel Manager, and Pershing had sent him to Louis Sarapis.

"You mean," Sarapis had said, "I launch from the *ocean?* From the Atlantic, out past the three mile limit?"

"A union is a national organization," Johnny had said. "Neither outfit has jurisdiction on the high seas. But a business organization is international."

"I'd need men out there. I'd need the same number, even more. Where'll I get them?"

"Go to India or the Malay States," Johnny had said. "Get young unskilled laborers and bring them over. Train them yourself on an indentured servant basis. In other words, charge the cost of their passage against their earnings." It was peonage, he knew. And it appealed to Louis Sarapis. A little empire on the high seas, worked by men who had no legal rights. Ideal.

Sarapis had done just that, and hired Johnny for his public relations department; that was the best place for a man who had brilliant ideas of a non-technical nature. In other words, an uneducated man: a *noncol.* A useless misfit, an outsider. A loner lacking college degrees.

"Hey, Johnny," Sarapis had said

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once. "How come since you're so bright you never went to school? Everyone knows that's fatal nowadays. Self-destructive impulse, maybe?" He had grinned, showing his stainless-steel teeth.

Moodily, he had replied, "You've got it, Louis. I want to die. I hate myself." At that point he had recalled his peonage idea. But that had come after he had dropped out of school, so it couldn't have been that. "Maybe I should see an analyst," he had said.

"Fakes," Louis had told him. "All of them — I know because I've had six on my staff, working for me exclusively at one time or another. What's wrong with you is you're an envious type. If you can't have it big you don't want it. You don't want the climb, the long struggle."

But I've got it big, Johnny Barefoot had realized even then. This is big, working for you. Everyone wants to work for Louis Sarapis; he gives all sorts of people jobs.

The double lines of mourners that filed past the casket . . . he wondered if all these people could be employees of Sarapis or relatives of employees. Either that or people who had benefited from the public dole that Sarapis had pushed through Congress and into law during the depression three years ago. Sarapis, in his old age the great daddy for the poor, the hungry, the out of work. Soup kitchens, with lines there, too. Just as now.

Perhaps the same people had been in those lines who were here today.

Startling Johnny, an auditorium guard nudged him. "Say, aren't you Mr. Barefoot, the P. R. man for old Louis?"

"Yes," Johnny said. He put out his cigarette and then began to unscrew the lid of the thermos of coffee which Sarah Belle had brought him. "Have some," he said. "Or maybe you're used to the cold in these civic halls." The City of Chicago had lent this spot for Louis to lie in state; it was gratitude for what he had done here in this area. The factories he had opened, the men he had put on the payroll.

"I'm not used," the guard said, accepting a cup of the coffee. "You know, Mr. Barefoot. I've always admired you because you're a noncol, and look how you rose to a top job and lots of salary, not to mention fame. It's an inspiration to us other noncols."

Grunting, Johnny sipped his own coffee.

'Of course," the guard said, "I guess it's really Sarapis we ought to thank; he gave you the job. My brother-in-law worked for him. That was back five years ago when nobody in the world was hiring except Sarapis. You hear what an old skinflint he was—wouldn't permit the unions to come in, and all. But he gave so many old folks pensions . . My father was living on a Sarapis pension-plan until the day he died. And all those bills he got through Congress; they wouldn't have passed any of the welfare for the needy bills without pressure from Sarapis."

Johnny grunted.

"No wonder there's so many people here today," the guard said. "

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can see why. Who's going to help the little fellow, the noncols like you and me, now that he's gone?"

Johnny had no answer, for himself or for the guard.

As owner of the Beloved Brethren Mortuary, Herbert Schoenheit von Vogelsang found himself required by law to consult with the late Mr. Sarapis' legal counsel, the well-known Mr. Claude St. Cyr. In this connection it was essential for him to know precisely how the half-life periods were to be proportioned out, since it was his job to execute the technical arrangements.

The matter should have been routine, and yet a snag developed almost at once. He was unable to get in touch with Mr. St. Cyr, trustee for the estate.

Drat, Schoenheit von Vogelsang thought to himself as he hung up the unresponsive phone. Something must be wrong! This is unheard-of in connection with a man so important.

He had phoned from the bin—the storage vaults in which the half-lifers were kept in perpetual quick-pack. At this moment, a worried-looking clerical sort of individual waited at the desk with a claim-check stub in his hand. Obviously he had shown up to collect a relative. Resurrection Day—the holiday on which the half-lifers were publicly honored—was just around the corner; the rush would soon be beginning.

"Yes, sir," Herb said to him, with an affable smile. "I'll take your stub personally."

"It's an elderly lady," the customer said. "About eighty, very small and wizened. I didn't want just to talk to her; I wanted to take her out for a while." He explained, "My grandmother."

"Only be a moment," Herb said, and went back into the bin to search out number 3054039-B.

When he located the correct party he scrutinized the lading report attached; it gave but fifteen days of half-life remaining. Automatically, he pressed a portable amplifier into the hull of the glass casket, tuned it, listened at the proper frequency for indication of cephalic activity.

Faintly from the speaker came, "... and then Tillie sprained her ankle and we never thought it'd heal; she was so foolish about it, wanting to start walking immediately..."

Satisfied, he unplugged the amplifier and located a union man to perform the actual task of carting 3054039-B to the loading platform, where the customer could place her in his 'copter or car.

"You checked her out?" the customer asked as he paid the money due.

"Personally," Herb answered. "Functioning perfectly." He smiled at the customer. "Happy Resurrection Day, Mr. Ford."

"Thank you," the customer said, starting off for the loading platform.

When I pass, Herb said to himself, I think I'll will my heirs to revive me one day a century. That way I can observe the fate of all mankind. But that meant a rather high maintenance cost to the heirs,

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and no doubt sooner or later they would kick over the traces, have the body taken out of quick-pack and — God forbid — buried.

"Burial is barbaric," Herb murmured aloud. "Remnant of the primitive origins of our culture."

"Yes sir," his secretary Miss Beasman agreed, at her typewriter.

In the bin, several customers communed with their half-lifer relations, in rapt quiet, distributed at intervals along the aisles which separated the caskets. It was a tranquil sight, these faithfuls, coming as they did so regularly to pay homage. They brought messages, news of what took place in the outside world; they cheered the gloomy half-lifers in these intervals of cerebral activity. And — they paid Herb Schoenheit Von Vogelsang. It was a profitable business, operating a mortuary.

"My dad seems a little frail," a young man said, catching Herb's attention. "I wonder if you could take a moment to check him over. I'd really appreciate it."

"Certainly," Herb said, accompanying the customer down the aisle to his deceased relative. The lading report showed only a few days remaining; that explained the vitiated quality of cerebration. But still — he turned up the gain, and the voice from the half-lifer became a trifle stronger. He's almost at an end, Herb thought. It was obvious that the son did not want to see the lading, did not actually care to know that contact with his dad was diminishing, finally. So Herb said nothing; he merely walked off, leaving the son to commune. Why tell him?

A truck had now appeared at the loading platform, and two men hopped down from it, wearing familiar pale blue uniforms. Atlas Interplan Van and Storage, Herb realized. Delivering another half-lifer, or here to pick up one which had expired. He strolled toward them. "Yes, gentlemen," he said.

The driver of the truck leaned out and said, "We're here to deliver Mr. Louis Sarapis. Got room all ready."

"Absolutely," Herb said at once. "But I can't get hold of Mr. St. Cyr to make arrangements for the schedule. When's he to be brought back?"

Another man, dark-haired, with shiny-button black eyes, emerged from the truck. "I'm John Barefoot. According to the terms of the will I'm in charge of Mr. Sarapis. He's to be brought back to life immediately; that's the instructions I'm charged with."

"I see," Herb said, nodding. "Well, that's fine. Bring him in and we'll plug him right in."

"It's cold here," Barefoot said. "Worse than the auditorium."

"Well, of course," Herb answered.

The crew from the van began wheeling the casket. Herb caught a glimpse of the dead man, the massive, gray face resembling something cast from a break-mold. Impressive old pirate, he thought. Good thing for us all he's dead finally, in spite of his charity work. Because who wants charity? Especially his. Of course, Herb did not say that to Barefoot; he contented himself with guiding the crew to the prearranged spot.

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"I'll have him talking in fifteen minutes," he promised Barefoot, who looked tense. "Don't worry. We've had almost no failures at this stage; the initial residual charge is generally quite vital."

"I suppose it's later," Barefoot said, "as it dims . . . then you have the technical problems."

"Why does he want to be brought back so soon?" Herb asked.

Barefoot scowled and did not answer.

"Sorry," Herb said, and continued tinkering with the wires which had to be seated perfectly to the cathode terminals of the casket. "At low temperatures," he murmured, "the flow of current is virtually unimpeded. There's no measurable resistance at minus 150g. So —" He fitted the anode cap in place. "The signal should bounce out clear and strong." In conclusion, he clicked the amplifier on.

A hum. Nothing more.

"Well?" Barefoot said.

"I'll recheck," Herb said, wondering what had gone afoul.

"Listen," Barefoot said quietly, "if you slip up here and let the spark flicker out —" It was not necessary for him to finish; Herb knew.

"Is it the Democratic-Republican National Convention that he wants to participate in?" Herb asked. The convention would be held later in the month, in Cleveland. In the past, Sarapis had been quite active in the behind-the-scenes activities at both the Democratic-Republican and the Liberal Party nominating conventions. It was said, in fact, that he had personally chosen the last Democratic-Republican candidate, Alfonse Gam. Tidy, handsome Gam had lost, but not by very much.

"Are you still getting nothing?" Barefoot asked.

"Um, it seems —" Herb said.

"Nothing. Obviously." Now Barefoot looked grim. "If you can't rouse him in another ten minutes *I'll* get hold of Claude St. Cyr and we'll take Louis out of your mortuary and lodge charges of negligence against you."

"I'm doing what I can," Herb said, perspiring as he fiddled with the leads to the casket. "We didn't perform the quick-pack installation, remember. There may have been a slip-up at that point."

Now static supervened over the steady hum.

"Is that him coming in?" Barefoot demanded.

"No," Herb admitted, thoroughly upset by now. It was, in fact, a bad sign.

"Keep trying," Barefoot said. But it was unnecessary to tell Herbert Schoenheit von Vogelsang that; he was struggling desperately, with all he had, with all his years of professional competence in this field. And still he achieved nothing, Louis Sarapis remained silent.

I'm not going to be successful, Herb realized in fear. I don't understand why, either. *What's wrong?* A big client like this, and it has to get fouled up . . . he toiled on, not looking at Barefoot, not daring to . . .

At the radio telescope at Kennedy Slough, on the dark side of Luna,

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Chief Technician Owen Angress discovered that he had picked up a signal emanating from a region one light-week beyond the solar system in the direction of Proxima. Ordinarily such a region of space would have held little of interest for the U. N. Commission on Deep-space Communications, but this, Owen Angress realized, was unique.

What reached him, thoroughly amplified by the great antennae of the radio telescope, was, faintly but clearly, a human voice.

"...probably let it slide by," the voice was declaring. "If I know them, and I believe I do. That Johnny! He'd revert without my keeping my eye on him, but at least he's not a crook like St. Cyr. I did right to fire St. Cyr. Assuming I can make it stick..." The voice faded momentarily.

What's out there? Angress wondered, dazedly. "At one fifty-second of a light-year," he murmured, making a quick mark on the deep-space map which he had been recharting. "Nothing. That's just empty dust-clouds." He could not understand what the signal implied; was it being bounced back to Luna from some nearby transmitter? Was this, in other words, merely an echo?

Or was he reading his computation incorrectly?

Surely this couldn't be correct. Some individual ruminating at a transmitter out beyond the solar system... a man not in a hurry, thinking aloud in a kind of half-slumbering attitude, as if free-associating . . . it made no sense.

I'd better report this to Wycoff at the Soviet Academy of Sciences, he said to himself. Wycoff was his current superior; next month it would be Jamison of MIT. Maybe it's a long-haul ship that —

The voice filtered in clearly once again. "...that Gam is a fool, did wrong to select him. Know better now but too late. Hello?" The thoughts became sharp, the words more distinct. "Am I coming back — for God's sake, it's about time. Hey. Johnny! Is that you?"

Angress picked up the telephone and dialed the code for the line to the Soviet Union.

"Speak up, Johnny!" the voice from the speaker demanded plaintively. "Come on, son; I've got so damn much on my mind. So much to do. Convention's started yet, has it? Got no sense of time stuck in here, can't see or hear; wait'll you get here and you'll find out..." Again the voice faded.

This is exactly what Wycoff likes to call a *phenomenon,* Angress realized.

And I can understand why.

On the evening television news, Claude St. Cyr heard the announcer babbling about a discovery made by the radio telescope on Luna, but he paid little attention; he was busy mixing martinis for his guests.

"Yes," he said to Gertrude Harvey, "ironic as it is, I drew up the will myself, including the clause that automatically dismissed me, canceled my services out of existence the moment he died. And I'll tell you why Louis did that. He had para-

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noid suspicions of me, so he figured that with such a clause he'd insure himself against being —" he paused as he measured out the iota of dry wine which accompanied the gin — "being prematurely dispatched." He grinned, and Gertrude, arranged decoratively on the couch beside her husband, smiled back.

"A lot of good it did him," Phil Harvey said.

"Hell," St. Cyr protested. "I had nothing to do with his death. It was an embolus. A great fat clot stuck like a cork in a bottleneck." He laughed at the image. "Nature's own remedy."

Gertrude said, "Listen. The TV; it's saying something strange." She rose, walked over to it and bent down, her ear close to the speaker.

"It's probably that oaf Kent Margrave," St. Cyr said. "Making another political speech." Margrave had been their President now for four years. A Liberal, he had managed to defeat Alfonse Gam, who had been Louis Sarapis' hand-picked choice for the office.

Actually Margrave, for all his faults, was quite a politician. He had managed to convince large blocs of voters that having a puppet of Sarapis' for their President was not such a good idea.

"No," Gertrude said, carefully arranging her skirt over her bare knees. "This is — the space agency, I think. Science."

"Science!" St. Cyr laughed. "Well, then let's listen. I admire science. Turn it up." I suppose they've found another planet in the Orionus System, he said to himself. Something more for us to make the goal of our collective existence.

"A voice," the TV announcer was saying, "emanating from outer space, tonight has scientists both in the United States and the Soviet Union completely baffled."

"Oh no," St. Cyr choked. "A voice from outer space! Please, no more." Doubled up with laughter, he moved away from the TV set; he could not bear to listen any more. "That's what we need," he said to Phil. "A voice that turns out to be — you know Who it is."

"Who?" Phil asked.

"God, of course. The radio telescope at Kennedy Slough has picked up the voice of God and now we're going to receive another set of divine commandments or at least a few scrolls." Removing his glasses he wiped his eyes with his Irish linen handkerchief.

Dourly, Phil Harvey said, "Personally I agree with my wife. I find it fascinating."

"Listen, my friend," St. Cyr said, "you know it'll turn out to be a transistor radio that some Jap student lost on a trip between Earth and Callisto. And the radio just drifted on out of the solar system entirely and now the telescope has picked it up and it's a huge mystery to all the scientists." He became more sober. "Shut it off, Gert. We've got serious things to consider."

Obediently, but reluctantly, she did so. "Is it true, Claude," she asked, rising to her feet, "that the mortuary wasn't able to revive old

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Louis? That he's not in half-life as he's supposed to be by now?"

"Nobody tells me anything from the organization, now," St. Cyr answered. "But I did hear a rumor to that effect." He knew, in fact, that it was so. He had many friends within Wilhelmina, but he did not like to talk about these surviving links.

Gertrude shivered. "Imagine not coming back. How dreadful!"

"But that was the old natural condition," her husband pointed out as he drank his martini. "Nobody had half-life before the turn of the century."

"But we're used to it," she said stubbornly.

To Phil Harvey, St. Cyr said, "Let's continue our discussion."

Shrugging, Harvey said, "All right. If you really feel there's something to discuss." He eyed St. Cyr critically. "I could put you on my legal staff, yes — if that's what you're sure you want. But I can't give you the kind of business that Louis could. It wouldn't be fair to the legal men I have in there now."

"Oh, I recognize that," St. Cyr said. After all, Harvey's drayage firm was small in comparison with the Sarapis outfits. Harvey was in fact a minor figure in the 3-4 shipping business.

But that was precisely what St. Cyr wanted. Because he believed that within a year, with the experience and contacts he had gained working for Louis Sarapis, he could depose Harvey and take over Elektra Enterprises.

Harvey's first wife had been named Elektra. St. Cyr had known her, and after she and Harvey had split up St. Cyr had continued to see her, now in a more personal — and more spirited — way. It had always seemed to him that Elektra Harvey had obtained a rather bad deal. Harvey had employed legal talent of sufficient caliber to outwit Elektra's attorney . . . who had been, as a matter of fact, St. Cyr's junior law partner, Harold Faine. Ever since her defeat in the courts, St. Cyr had blamed himself. Why hadn't he taken the case personally? But he had been so tied up with Sarapis business that it had simply not been possible.

Now, with Sarapis gone and his job with Atlas, Wilhelmina and Archimedean over, he could take some time to rectify the imbalance. He could come to the aid of the woman (he admitted it) whom he loved.

But that was a long step from this situation; first he had to get into Harvey's legal staff — at any cost. Evidently he was succeeding.

"Shall we shake on it, then?" he asked Harvey, holding out his hand.

"Okay," Harvey said, not very much stirred by the event. He held out his hand, however, and they shook. "By the way," he said then, "I have some knowledge — fragmentary but evidently accurate — as to why Sarapis cut you off in his will. And it isn't what you said at all."

"Oh?" St. Cyr said, trying to sound casual.

"My understanding is that he suspected someone, possibly you, of

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desiring to prevent him from returning to half-life. That you were going to select a particular mortuary which certain contacts of yours operate . . . and they'd somehow fail to revive the old man." He eyed St. Cyr. "And oddly, that seems to be exactly what has happened."

There was silence.

Gertrude said at last, "Why would Claude not want Louis Sarapis to be resurrected?"

"I have no idea," Harvey said. He stroked his chin thoughtfully. "I don't even fully understand half-life itself. Isn't it true that the half-lifer often finds himself in possession of a sort of insight, of a new frame of reference, a perspective, that he lacked while alive?"

"I've heard psychologists say that," Gertrude agreed. "It's what the old theologists called *conversion.*"

"Maybe Claude was afraid of some insight that Louis might show up with," Harvey said. "But that's just conjecture."

"Conjecture," Claude St. Cyr agreed, "in its entirety, including that plan you described. In actual fact I know absolutely no one in the mortuary business." His voice was steady, too; he made it come out that way. But this all was very sticky, he said to himself.

The maid appeared to tell them that dinner was ready. Both Phil and Gertrude rose, and Claude joined them as they entered the dining room together.

"Tell me," Phil Harvey said to Claude. "Who is Sarapis' heir?"

St. Cyr said, "A granddaughter who lives on Callisto. Her name is Kathy Egmont and she's an odd one. She's about twenty years old and already she's been in jail five times, mostly for narcotics addiction. Lately, I understand, she's managed to cure herself of the drug habit and now she's a religious convert of some kind. I've never met her but I've handled volumes of correspondence passing between her and old Louis."

"And she gets the entire estate, when it's out of probate? With all the political power inherent in it?"

"Haw," St. Cyr said. "Political power can't be willed, can't be passed on. All Kathy gets is the economic syndrome. It functions, as you know, through the parent holding company licensed under the laws of the state of Delaware, Wilhelmina Securities. And that's hers, if she cares to make use of it — if she can understand what it is she's inheriting."

Phil Harvey said, "You don't sound very optimistic."

"All the correspondence from her indicates — to me at least — that she's a sick, criminal type, very eccentric and unstable. The very last sort I'd like to see inherit Louis' holdings."

On that note, they seated themselves at the dinner table.

In the night, Johnny Barefoot heard the phone, drew himself to a sitting position and fumbled until his hands touched the receiver. Beside him in the bed Sarah Belle stirred as he said, "Hello."

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A fragile female voice said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Barefoot. I didn't mean to wake you up. But I was told by my attorney to call you as soon as I arrived on Earth." She added, "This is Kathy Egmont, although actually my real name is Mrs. Kathy Sharp. Do you know who I am?"

"Yes," Johnny said, rubbing his eyes and yawning. He shivered from the cold of the room. Beside him, Sarah Belle drew the covers back up over her shoulders and turned the other way. "Want me to come and pick you up? Do you have a place to stay?"

"I have no friends here on Terra," Kathy said. "But the space-port people told me that the Beverely is a good hotel, so I'm going there. I started from Callisto as soon as I heard that my grandfather had died."

"You made good time," he said. He hadn't expected her for another twenty-four hours.

"Is there any chance—" The girl sounded timid. "Could I possibly stay with you, Mr. Barefoot? It scares me, the idea of a big hotel where no one knows me."

"I'm sorry," he said at once, "I'm married." And then he realized that such a retort was not only inappropriate . . . it was actually abusive. "What I mean is," he explained, "I have no spare room. You stay at the Beverely tonight and tomorrow we'll find you a more acceptable apartment."

"All right," Kathy said. She sounded resigned but still anxious. "Tell me, Mr. Barefoot, is my grandfather in half-life yet?"

"No," Johnny said. "It's failed, so far. They're working on it." When he had left the mortuary, five technicians had been busy at work, trying to discover what was wrong.

Kathy said, "I thought it might work out that way."

"Why?"

"Well, my grandfather — he was so different from everyone else. I realize you know that, perhaps even better than I. After all, you were with him daily. But I just couldn't imagine him inert, the way the half-lifers are. Passive and helpless, you know. Can you imagine him like that, after all he's done?"

Johnny said, "Let's talk tomorrow. I'll come by the hotel about nine. Okay?"

"Yes, that's fine. I'm glad to have met you, Mr. Barefoot. I hope you'll stay on with Archimedean, working for me. Goodbye." The phone clicked; she had rung off.

My new boss, Johnny said to himself. Wow.

"Who was that?" Sarah Belle murmured. "At this hour?"

"The owner of Archimedean," Johnny said. "My employer."

"Louis Sarapis?" His wife sat up at once. "Oh . . . you mean his granddaughter; she's here already. What's she sound like?"

"I can't tell," he said meditatively. "Frightened, mostly. It's a finite, small world she comes from, compared with Terra, here." He did not tell his wife the things he knew about Kathy, her drug addiction, her terms in jail.

"Can she take over now?" Sarah

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Belle asked. "Doesn't she have to wait until Louis' half-life is over?"

"Legally, he's dead. His will has come into force." And, he thought acidly, he's not in half-life anyhow. He's silent and dead in his plastic quick-pack, which evidently wasn't quite quick enough.

"How do you think you'll get along with her?"

"I don't know," he said candidly. "I'm not even sure I'm going to try." He did not like the idea of working for a woman, especially one younger than himself. And one who was — at least acording to hearsay — virtually psychopathic. But on the phone she had certainly not sounded psychopathic. He mulled that over in his mind, wide-awake, now.

"She's probably very pretty," Sarah Belle said. "You'll probably fall in love with her and desert me."

"Oh no," he said. "Nothing as startling as that. I'll probably try to work for her. I'll drag out a few miserable months, and then give up and look elsewhere." And meanwhile he though, *what about Louis? Are we or are we not going to be* able to revive him? That was the really big unknown.

If the old man could be revived, he could direct his granddaughter. Even though legally and physically dead, he could continue to manage his complex economic and political sphere to some extent. But right now this was simply not working out.

And the old man had planned on being revived at once, certainly before the Democratic-Republican Convention. Louis certainly knew — or rather had known — what sort of person he was willing his holdings to. Without help she surely could not function. And, Johnny thought, there's little I can do for her. Claude St. Cyr could have, but by the terms of the will he's out of the picture entirely. So what is left? We must keep trying to revive old Louis, even if we have to visit every mortuary in the United States, Cuba and Russia.

"You're thinking confused thoughts," Sarah Belle said. "I can tell by your expression." She had turned on the small lamp by the bed, and was now reaching for her robe. "Don't try to solve serious matters in the middle of the night."

This must be how half-life feels, he thought groggily. He shook his head, trying to clear it and wake up fully.

The next morning he parked his car in the underground garage of the Beverely and ascended by elevator to the lobby and the front desk, where he was greeted by the smiling day clerk.

It was not much of a hotel, Johnny decided. Clean, however, a respectable family hotel which probably rented many of its units by the month, some no doubt to elderly retired people. Evidently Kathy was accustomed to living modestly.

In answer to his query, the clerk pointed to the adjoining coffee shop. "You'll find her in there, eating breakfast. She said you might be calling, Mr. Barefoot."

In the coffee shop he found a

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good number of people having breakfast. He stopped short, wondering which was Kathy. The dark-haired girl with the stilted, frozen features, over in the far corner out of the way? He walked toward her. Her hair, he decided, was dyed. Without make-up she looked unnaturally pale; her skin had a stark quality, as if she had known a good deal of suffering, and not the sort that taught or informed one, made one into a "better" person. It had been pure pain, with no redemptive aspects, he decided as he studied her.

"Kathy?" he asked.

The girl turned her head — her eyes empty; her expression totally flattened. In a little voice she said, "Yes. Are you John Barefoot?" As he came up to the booth and seated himself opposite her she watched as if she imagined he would spring at her, hurl himself on her and — God forbid — sexually assault her. It's as if she's nothing more than a lone, small animal, he thought. Backed into a corner to face the entire world.

The color, or rather lack of it, could stem from the drug addiction, he decided. But that did not explain the flatness of her tone, and her utter lack of facial expression. And yet — she was pretty. She had delicate, regular features. Animated, they would have been interesting. And perhaps they had been, once. Years ago.

"I have only five dollars left," Kathy said. "After I paid for my one-way ticket and my hotel and my breakfast. Could you —" She hesitated. "I'm not sure exactly what to do. Could you tell me . . . do I own anything yet? Anything that was my grandfather's? That I could borrow against?"

Johnny said, "I'll write you a personal check for one hundred dollars and you can pay me back some time." He got out his checkbook.

"Really?" She looked stunned, and now, faintly, she smiled. "How trusting of you. Or are you trying to impress me? You were my grandfather's public relations man, weren't you? How were you dealt with in the will? I can't remember; it's all happened so fast."

"Well," he said. "I wasn't fired, as was Claude St. Cyr."

"Then you're staying on." That seemed to relieve her mind. "I wonder . . . would it be correct to say you're now working for *me?*

"You could say that," Johnny said. "Assuming you feel you need a P. R. man. Maybe you don't. Louis wasn't sure, half the time."

"Tell me what efforts have been made to resurrect him."

He explained to her, briefly, what he had done.

"And this is not generally known?" she asked.

"Definitely not. I know it, a mortuary owner with the unnatural name of Herb Schoenheit von Vogelsang knows it, and possibly news has trickled to a few high people in the drayage business, such as Phil Harvey. Even Claude St. Cyr may know it by now. Of course, as time goes on and Louis has nothing to say, no political pronouncements for the press —"

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"We'll have to make them up," Kathy said. "And pretend they're from him. That will be your job, Mr. Funnyfoot." She smiled once more. "Press releases by my grandfather, until he's finally revived or we give up. Do you think we'll have to give up?" After a pause she said softly, "I'd like to see him. If I may. If you think it's all right."

"I'll take you there, to the Beloved Brethren Mortuary. I have to go there within the hour anyhow."

Nodding, Kathy resumed eating her breakfast.

As Johnny Barefoot stood beside the girl, who gazed intently at the transparent casket, he thought bizarrely, maybe she'll rap on the glass and say *Grandfather, you wake up.* And, he thought, maybe that will accomplish it. Certainly nothing else has.

Wringing his hands, Herb Schoenheit von Vogelsang burbled miserably, "I just don't understand it, Mr. Barefoot. We worked all night in relays. We just aren't getting a single spark. And yet we ran an electroencephalograph and the 'gram shows faint but unmistakable cerebral activity. So the after-life is there, but we can't seem to contact it. We've got probes at every part of the skull now, as you can see." He pointed to the maze of hair-wires connecting the dead man's head to the amplifying equipment surrounding the casket. "I don't know what else we can do, sir."

"Is there measurable brain metabolism?" Johnny asked.

"Yes, sir. We called in outside experts and they detected it. It's a normal amount, too. Just what you'd expect, immediately after death."

Kathy said calmly, "I know it's hopeless. He's too big a man for this. This is for aged relatives. For grandmothers, to be trotted out once a year on Resurrection Day." She turned away from the casket. "Let's go," she said to Johnny.

Together, he and the girl walked along the sidewalk from the mortuary, neither speaking. It was a mild spring day, and the trees here and there at the curb had small pink flowers. Cherry trees, Johnny decided.

"Death," Kathy murmured, at last. "And rebirth. A technological miracle. Maybe when Louis saw what it was like on the other side he changed his mind about coming back. Maybe he just doesn't *want* to return."

"Well," Johnny said, "the electrical spark is there. He's inside there, thinking something." He let Kathy take his arm as they crossed the street. "Someone told me," he said, "that you're interested in religion."

"Yes, I am," Kathy said quietly. "You see, when I was a narcotics addict I took an overdose — never mind of what — and as a result my heart action ceased. I was officially, medically dead for several minutes. They brought me back by open-heart massage and electroshock ... you know. During that time I had an experience, probably much like those who go into half-life have experienced."

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"Was it better than here?"

"No," she said. "But it was different. It was — dreamlike. I don't mean vague or unreal. I mean the logic, the weightlessness. You see, that's the main difference. You're free of gravity. It's hard to realize how important that is, but just think how many of the characteristics of the dream derive from that one fact."

Johnny said, "And it changed you."

"I managed to overcome the oral addictive aspects of my personality, if that's what you mean. I learned to control my appetites. My greed." At a newspaper stand Kathy halted to read the headlines. "Look," she said.

VOICE FROM OUTER SPACE BAFFLES SCIENTISTS

"Interesting," Johnny said.

Kathy, picking up the newspaper, read the article which accompanied the headline. "How strange," she said. "They've picked up a sentient, living entity . . . here, you can read it, too." She passed the newspaper to him. "I did that, when I died. I drifted out, free of the solar system, first past planetary gravity and then the sun's. I wonder who it is." Taking the newspaper back she reread the article, carefully going over each word.

"Ten cents, sir or madam," the robot vender said, suddenly.

Johnny tossed it the dime.

"Do you think it's my grandfather?" Kathy asked.

"Hardly," Johnny said.

"I think it its," Kathy said, staring past him, deep in thought. "I know it is. Look, it began one week after his death, and it's one light-week out. The time fits, and here's the transcript of what it's saying." She pointed to the column. "All about you, Johnny, and about me and about Claude St. Cyr, that lawyer he fired, and the Convention. It's all there, but garbled. That's the way your thoughts run when you're dead. All compressed, instead of in sequence." She smiled up at Johnny. "So we've got a terrible problem. We can hear him, by use of the radio telescope at Kennedy Slough. But he can't hear us."

"You don't actually —"

"Oh, I do," she said matter-of factly. "I knew he wouldn't settle for half-life. This is a whole, entire life he's leading now, out in space there, beyond the last planet of our system. And there isn't going to be any way we can interfere with him — whatever it is he's doing." She began to walk on, once more, Johnny followed. "Whatever it is, it's going to be at least as much as he did when he was alive here on Terra. You can be sure of that. Are you afraid?"

"Hell," Johnny protested, "I'm not even convinced, let alone afraid!" And yet — perhaps she was right. She seemed so certain about it. He could not help being a little impressed, a little convinced.

"You should be afraid," Kathy said. "He may be very strong, out there. He may be able to do a lot. Affect a lot . . . affect us, what we do and say and believe. Even with-

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out the radio telescope, he may be reaching us even now. Subliminally."

"I don't believe it," Johnny said. But he did, in spite of himself. She was right. It was just what Louis Sarapis would do.

Kathy said, "We'll know more when the Convention begins, because that's what he cares about. He failed to get Gam elected last time, and that was one of the few times in his life that he was beaten."

"Gam!" Johnny echoed, amazed. "That has-been? Is he even still in existence? Why, he completely disappeared, four years ago!"

"My grandfather won't give up with him," Kathy said meditatively. "And he is alive. He's a turkey farmer or some such thing, on Io. Perhaps it's ducks. Anyhow, he's there. Waiting."

"Waiting for what?"

Kathy said. "For my grandfather to contact him again. As he did before, four years ago, at the Convention then."

"No one would vote for Gam again!" Repelled, he gazed at her.

Smiling, Kathy said nothing. But she squeezed his arm, hugging him. As if, he thought, she were afraid again, as she had been in the night, when he had talked to her. Perhaps even more so.

The handsome. dapper, middle-aged man wearing vest and narrow, old-fashioned necktie, rose to his feet as Claude St. Cyr entered the outer office of St. Cyr and Faine, on his way to court. "Mr. St. Cyr —"

Glancing at him, St. Cyr murmured, "I'm in a rush; you'll have to make an appointment with my secretary." And then he recognized the man. He was talking to Alfonse Gam.

Gam said, "I have a telegram from Louis Sarapis." He reached into his coat pocket.

"Sorry," St. Cyr said stiffly. "I'm associated with Mr. Phil Harvey now. My business relationship with Mr. Sarapis was terminated several weeks ago." But he paused, curious. He had met Gam before. At the time of the national campaign, four years ago, he had seen a good deal of the man — in fact, he had represented Gam in several libel suits, one with Gam as the plaintiff, the other as defendant.

Gam said, "This wire arrived the day before yesterday."

"But Sarapis has been —" Claude St. Cyr broke off. "Let me see it." He held out his hand, and Gam passed him the wire.

It was a statement from Louis Sarapis to Gam, assuring Gam of Louis' utter and absolute support in the forth coming struggle at the Convention. And Gam was correct; the wire was dated only three days before. It did not make sense.

"I can't explain it, Mr. St. Cyr," Gam said drily. "But it sounds like Louis. He wants me to run again — as you can see. It never occurred to me. As far as I'm concerned I'm out of politics and in the guinea-fowl business. I thought you might know something about this, who sent it and why." He added, "Assuming that old Louis didn't."

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St. Cyr said, "How could Louis have sent it?"

"I mean, written it before his death and had someone send it just the other day. Yourself, perhaps." Gam shrugged. "Evidently it wasn't you. Perhaps Mr. Barefoot, then." He reached out for the wire.

"Do you actually intend to run again?" St. Cyr asked.

"If Louis wants me to."

"And lose again? Drag the party to defeat again, just because one stubborn, vindictive old man —" St. Cyr broke off. "Go back to raising guinea fowl, Gam. Forget politics. You're a loser. Everyone in the party knows it. Everyone in America, in fact."

"How can I contact Mr. Barefoot?"

St. Cyr said, "I have no idea." He started on.

"I'll need legal help," Gam said.

"For what? Who's suing you now? You don't need legal help, Mr. Gam; you need medical help, a psychiatrist to explain why you want to run again. Listen." He leaned toward Gam. "If Louis alive couldn't get you into office, Louis dead certainly can't." He went on then, leaving Gam standing there.

"Wait," Gam said.

Reluctantly, Claude St. Cyr turned around.

"This time I'm going to win," Gam said. He sounded as if he meant it. His voice, instead of its usual reedy flutter, was firm.

Uneasy, St. Cyr said, "Well, good luck. To both you and Louis."

"Then he *is* alive." Gam's eyes flickered.

"I didn't say that. I was being ironic."

Gam said thoughtfully. "But he is alive, I'm sure of it. I'd like to find him. I went to a number of the mortuaries, but none of them had him, or if they did, they wouldn't admit it. I'll keep looking. I want to confer with him." He added, "That's why I came here from Io."

At that point, St. Cyr managed to break away and depart. What a nonentity, he said to himself. A cipher, nothing but a puppet of Louis'. He shuddered. God protect us from that man as our next President.

Imagine us *all* becoming like Gam!

It was not a pleasant thought; it did not inspire him for the day ahead. And he had a good deal of important work that he had to accomplish today

This was the day that he, as attorney for Phil Harvey, would make Mrs. Kathy Sharp — the former Kathy Egmont — an offer for Wilstock would be involved; voting stock, redistributed in such a fashion that Harvey gained control of Wilhelmina. The worth of the corporation being almost impossible to calculate, Harvey was offering not money but real estate in exchange; he had enormous tracts of land on Ganymede, deeded to him by the Soviet Government a decade ago in exchange for technical assistance he had rendered it and its colonies before that.

The chance of Kathy accepting this deal was indeed very slight, he thought.

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And yet the offer had to be made. The alternative next step — he shrank from even thinking about it — involved a fracas to the death in the area of direct economic competition, between Harvey's drayage firm and hers. And hers, he knew, were now in a state of decay. There had been union trouble since the old man's death. The thing that Louis hated the most had started to take place: union organizers had begun to move in on Archimedean.

He himself sympathized with the unions. It was about time they came onto the scene. Only the old man's dirty tactics and his boundless energy, not to speak of his ruthless, eternal imagination, had kept them out. Kathy had none of these. And Johnny Barefoot —

What can you ask of a noncol? St. Cyr asked himself caustically. Brilliant strategy-purse out of the sow's ear of mediocrity?

And Barefoot had his hands full building up Kathy's image before the public. He had barely begun to succeed in that when the union squabbles broke out. An ex-narcotics addict and religious nut, a woman who had a criminal record . . . Johnny had his work cut out for him.

Where he had been productive lay in the area of the woman's physical appearance. She looked sweet, even gentle and pure. Almost saintly. Johnny had seized on this. Instead of quoting her in the press he had photographed her in a thousand wholesome poses — with dogs, children, at county fairs, at hospitals, involved in charity drives — the whole business.

But unfortunately Kathy had spoiled the image he had created, spoiled it in a rather unusual way.

Kathy maintained simply that she was in communication with her grandfather. That it was he who lay a light-week out in space, picked up by Kennedy Slough. She heard him, as the rest of the world did . . . and by some miracle he heard her, too.

St. Cyr, riding the self-service elevator up to the 'copter port on the roof, laughed aloud. Her religious crankery couldn't be kept from the gossip columnists. Kathy had said too much in public places, in restaurants and small, famous bars. Even with Johnny beside her. Even he couldn't keep her quiet.

Also, there had been that incident at that party in which she had taken off her clothes, declaring the hour of purification to be momentarily arriving. She had daubed herself in certain spots with crimson nail polish as a sort of ritual ceremony. Of course, she had been drinking.

And this is the woman, St. Cyr thought, who operates Archimdean!

The woman we must oust, for our good *and* the public's. It was, to him, practically a mandate in the name of the people. Virtually a public service to be performed, and the only one who did not see it that way was Johnny.

St. Cyr thought, Johnny *likes* her. There's the motive. I wonder, he mused, what Sarah Belle thinks of that.

Feeling cheerful, St. Cyr entered his 'copter, closed the hatch and inserted his key in the ignition. Then

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he thought again of Alfonse Gam. And his good-humor vanished.

There are two people, he realized who are acting on the assumption that old Louis Sarapis is alive; Kathy Egmont Sharp and Alfonse Gam.

Two most unsavory people; and, in spite of himself, he was being forced to associate with both of them. It seemed to be his fate.

He thought, I'm no better off than I was with old Louis. In some respects, I'm even worse off.

The 'copter rose into the sky, on its way to Phil Harvey's building in downtown Denver.

Being late, he snaped on the little transmitter, picked up the microphone and put in a call to Harvey. "Phil," he said, "can you hear me? This is St. Cyr and I'm on my way west." He listened, then.

— Listened, and heard from the speaker a far-off weird babble, a murmur as if many words were being blended into a confusion. He recognized it. He had come onto it several times now, on the TV news programs.

"... spite of personal attacks, much superior to Chambers, who couldn't win an election for janitor of a house of ill repute. You keep up faith in yourself, Alfonse. People know a good man. They value him. You wait. Faith moves mountains. I ought to know, look what I've accomplished in my life..."

It was, St. Cyr realized, the entity a light-week out, now emitting an even more powerful signal. Like sunspots, it beclouded normal transmission channels. He cursed, scowled, then snapped off the receiver.

Fouling up communications, he said to himself. Must be against the law; I ought to consult the FCC.

Shaken, he piloted his 'copter on, across open farm land.

My God, he thought, *it did sound like old Louis!*

Could Kathy Egmont Sharp possibly be right?

At the Michigan plant of Archimedean, Johnny Barefoot appeared for his appointment with Kathy and found her in a state of gloom.

"Don't you see what's happening?" she demanded, facing him across the office which had once been Louis'. "I'm not managing things right at all. Everybody knows that. Don't you know that?" Wild-eyed, she stared at him.

"I don't know that," Johnny said. But inside he did know it; she was correct. "Take it easy and sit down," he said. "Harvey and St. Cyr will be here any minute now, and you want to be in command of yourself when you meet them." It was a meeting which he had hoped to avoid. But, he had realized, sooner or later it would take place, and so he had let Kathy agree to it.

Kathy said, "I — have something terrible to tell you."

"What is it? It can't be so terrible." He set himself, waiting in dread to hear.

"I'm back on drugs, Johnny. All this responsibility and pressure is too much for me. I'm sorry." She gazed down at the floor sadly.

"What is the drug?"

"I'd rather not say. It's one of the amphetamines. I've read the litera-

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ture; I know it can cause a psychosis, in the amounts I'm taking. But I don't care." Panting, she turned away, her back to him. He saw, now, how thin she had gotten. And her face was gaunt and hollow-eyed. He now understood why. The overdosage of amphetamines wasted the body away, turned matter into energy. Her metabolism was altered so that she became, as the addiction returned, a pseudo-hyperthyroid, with all the somatic processes speeded up.

Johnny said, "I'm sorry to hear it." He had been afraid of this. And yet when it had come he had not understood; he had had to wait until she told him. "I think," he said, "you should be under a doctor's care." He wondered where she got the drug. But probably with her years of experience it was not difficult.

"It makes a person very unstable emotionally," Kathy said. "Given to sudden rages and also crying jags. I want you to know that, so you won't blame me. So you'll understand that it's the drug." She tried to smile; he saw her making the effort.

Going over to her he put his hand on her shoulder. "Listen," he said, "when Harvey and St. Cyr get here, I think you better accept their offer."

"Oh," she said, nodding. "Well."

"And then," he said, "I want you to go voluntarily into a hospital."

"The cookie factory," Kathy said bitterly.

"You'd be better off," he said, "without the responsibility you have here at Archimedean. What you need is deep, protracted rest. You're in a state of mental and physical fatigue, but as long as you're taking that amphetamine —"

"Then it doesn't catch up with me," Kathy finished. "Johnny, I can't sell out to Harvey and St. Cyr."

"Why not?"

"Louis wouldn't want me to. He —" She was silent a moment. "He says no."

Johnny said, "Your health, maybe your life —"

"My sanity, you mean, Johnny."

"You have too much personally at stake," he said. "The hell with Louis. The hell with Archimedean! You want to find yourself in a mortuary, too, in half-life? It's not worth it. It's just property, and you're a living creature."

She smiled. And then, on the desk, a light came on and a buzzer sounded. The receptionist outside said, "Mrs. Sharp, Mr. Harvey and Mr. St. Cyr are here. Shall I send them in?"

"Yes," she answered.

The door opened, and Claude St. Cyr and Phil Harvey came swiftly in. "Hey, Johnny," St. Cyr said. He seemed to be in a confident mood. Beside him, Harvey looked confident, too.

Kathy said, "I'll let Johnny do most of the talking."

He glanced at her. *Did that mean she had agreed to sell?* He said, "What kind of deal is this? What do you have to offer in exchange for a controlling interest in Wilhelmina

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Securities of Delaware? I can't imagine what it could be."

"Ganymede. An entire moon," St. Cyr said, and added, "Virtually."

"Oh, yes," Johnny said. "The USSR land deed. Has it been tested in the international courts?"

"Yes," St. Cyr said, "and found totally valid. Its worth is beyond estimate. And each year it will increase, perhaps double, in value. My client will put that up. It's a good offer, Johnny. You and I know each other, and you know when I say it that it's true."

Probably it was, Johnny decided. It was in many respects a generous offer; Harvey was not trying to bilk Kathy.

"Speaking for Mrs. Sharp—" Johnny began. But Kathy cut him off.

"No," she said in a quick, brisk voice. "I can't sell. He says not to."

Johnny said, "You've already given me authority to negotiate, Kathy."

"Well," she said in a hard voice, "I'm taking it back."

"If I'm to work with you and for you at all," Johnny said, "you must go on my advice. We've already talked it over and agreed—"

The phone in the office rang.

"Listen to him yourself," Kathy said. She picked up the phone and held it out to Johnny. He'll tell you."

Johnny accepted the phone and put it to his ear. "Who is this?" he demanded. And then he heard the far-off, uncanny drumming noise, as if something were scratching at a long metal wire.

"... imperative to retain control. Your advice absurd. She can pull herself together; she's got the stuff. Panic reaction; you're scared because she's ill. A good doctor can fix her up. Get a doctor for her; get medical help. Get an attorney and be sure she stays out of the hands of the law. Make sure her supply of drugs is cut. Insist on ..." Johnny yanked the receiver away from his ear, refusing to hear more. Trembling, he hung the phone back up.

"You heard him," Kathy said. "Didn't you? *That was Louis.*"

"Yes," Johnny said.

"He's grown," Kathy said. "Now we can hear him direct; it's not just the radio telescope at Kennedy Slough. I heard him last night, clearly, for the first time, as I lay down to go to sleep."

To St. Cyr and Harvey, Johnny said, "We'll have to think your proposition over. Evidently. We'll have to get an appraisal of the worth of the unimproved real estate you're offering, and no doubt you want an audit of Willhelmina. That will take time." He heard his voice shake; he had not gotten over the shock of picking up the telephone and hearing the living voice of Louis Sarapis.

After making an appointment with St. Cyr and Harvey to meet with them once more later in the day, Johnny took Kathy out to a late breakfast. She had admitted reluctantly that she had eaten nothing since the night before.

"I'm just not hungry," she explained, as she sat picking listlessly at her plate of bacon and eggs.

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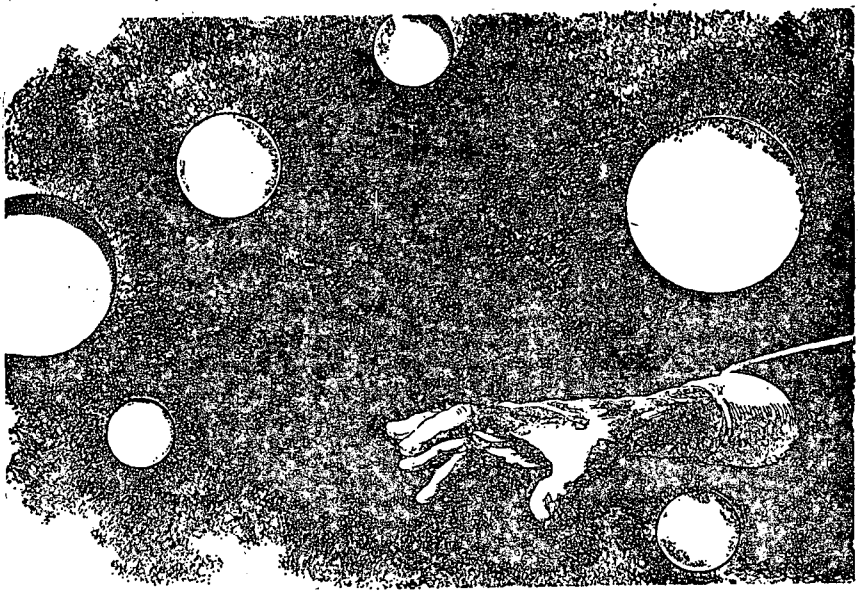

"Even if that was Louis Sarapis," Johnny said, "you don't —"

"It was. Don't say 'even if'. You know it's him. He's gaining power all the time, out there. Perhaps from the sun."

"So it's Louis," he said doggedly. "Nonetheless, you have to act in your own interest, not in his."

"His interests and mine are the same," Kathy said. "They involve maintaining Archimedean."

"Can he give you the help you need? Can he supply what's missing? He doesn't take your drug-addiction seriously; that's obvious. All he did was preach at me." He felt anger. "That's damn little help, for you or for me, in this situation."

"Johnny," she said, "I feel him near me all the time. I don't need the TV or the phone — I *sense* him. It's my mystical bent, I think. My religious intuition — it's helping me maintain contact with him." She sipped a little orange juice.

Bluntly, Johnny said, "It's your amphetamine psychosis, you mean."

"I won't go into the hospital, Johnny. I'm sick but not that sick. I can get over this bout on my own, because I'm not alone. I have my grandfather. And —" she smiled at him — "I have you."

"You won't have me, Kathy," he said quietly, "unless you sell to Harvey. Unless you accept the Ganymede real estate."

"You'd quit?"

"Yes," he said.

After a pause, Kathy said, "My grandfather says go ahead and quit." Her eyes were dark, enlarged, and utterly cold.

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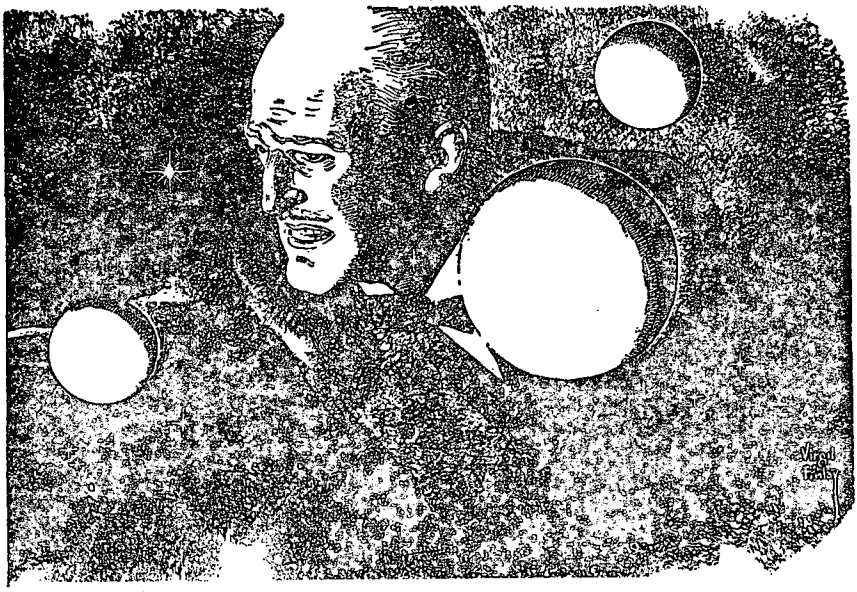

"I don't believe he'd say that."

"Then talk to him."

"How?"

Kathy pointed to the TV set in the corner of the restaurant. "Turn it on and listen."

Rising to his feet, Johnny said, "I don't have to. I'll be at my hotel if you change your mind." He walked away from the table, leaving her sitting there. Would she call after him? He listened as he walked. She did not call.

A moment later he was out of the restaurant, standing on the sidewalk. She had called his bluff, and so it ceased to be a bluff; it became the real thing. He actually had quit.

Stunned, he walked aimlessly on. And yet — he had been right. He knew that. It was just that . . . damn her, he thought. Why didn't she give in? Because of Louis, he realized. Without the old man she would have gone ahead and done it, traded her controlling, voting stock for the Ganymede property. Damn Louis Sarapis, not her, he thought furiously.

What now? he asked himself. Go back to New York? Look for a new job? For instance approach Alfonse Gam? There was money in that, if he could land it. Or should he stay here in Michigan, hoping that Kathy would change her mind?

She can't keep on, he decided. No matter what Sarapis tells her — or rather, what she believes he's telling her, whichever it is.

Hailing a cab, he gave the driver the address of his hotel room. A few moments later he was entering the lobby of the Antler Hotel, back

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where he had started early in the morning. Back to the forbidding empty room, this time merely to sit and hope that Kathy would change her mind and call him. This time he had no appointment to go to: the appointment was over.

When he reached his hotel room he heard his phone ringing.

For a moment Johnny stood at the at the door, key in hand, listening to the phone on the other side of the door, the shrill noise reaching him as he stood in the hall. Is it Kathy? he wondered. Or is it *him?*

He put the key in the lock, turned it, and entered the room; sweeping the receiver off its hook he said, "Hello."

Drumming and far-off, the voice, in the middle of its monotonous monolog, its recitation to itself, was murmuring, "...no good at all, Barefoot, to leave her. Betrayal of your job. Thought you understood your responsibility. Same to her as it was to me, and you never would have walked off in a fit of pique and left me. I deliberately left the disposition of my body to you so you'd stay on. You can't..." At that point Johnny hung up, chilled.

The phone rang again, at once.

This time he did not take it off the hook. The hell with you, he said to himself. He walked to the window and stood looking down at the street below, thinking to himself of the conversation he had held with old Louis years ago, the one that had made an impression in his mind. The conversation in which it had come out that he had failed to go to college because he wanted to die. Looking down at the street below, he thought, Maybe I ought to jump. At least there'd be no more phones ...no more of *it*.

The worst part, he thought, is its *senility*. Its thoughts are not clear, not distinct: they're dream-like, irrational. The old man is not genuinely alive. He is not even in half-life. This is a dwindling away of consciousness toward a nocturnal state. And we are forced to listen to it as it unwinds, as it devolves step by step, to final, total death.

But even in this degenerative state, it had desires. It *wanted*, and strongly. It wanted him to do something; it wanted Kathy to do something; the remnants of Louis Sarapis were vital and active, and clever enough to find ways of pursuing him to get what was wanted. It was a travesty of Louis' wishes during his lifetime, and yet it could not be ignored or escaped.

The phone continued to ring.

Maybe it isn't Louis, he thought then. Maybe it's Kathy. Going to it he lifted the receiver. And put it back down at once. The drumming once more, the fragments of Louis Sarapis' personality...he shuddered. And is it just here, is it selective?

He had a terrible feeling that it was *not* selective.

Going to the TV set at the far end of the room he snapped the switch. The screen grew into lighted animation, and yet, he saw, it was strangely blurred. The dim outlines of — it seemed to be a face.

And everyone, he realized, is seeing this. He turned to another chan-

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nel. Again the dully-formed features, the old man half-materialized here on the television screen. And from the set's speaker the murmur of indistinct words. "...told you time and again your primary responsibility is to..." Johnny shut the set off; the ill-formed face and words sank out of existence, and all that remained, once more, was the ringing phone.

He picked up the phone and said, "Louis, can you hear me?"

"...when election time comes they'll see. A man with the spirit to campaign a second time, take the financial responsibility, after all it's only for wealthy men now, the cost of running..." The voice droned on. No, the old man could not hear him. It was not a conversation but a monolog. It was not authentic communication.

And yet the old man knew what was occurring on Earth; he seemed to understand, to somehow see, that Johnny had quit his job.

Hanging up the phone he seated himself and lit a cigarette.

I can't go back to Kathy, he realized, unless I'm willing to change my mind and advise her not to sell. And that's impossible. What is there left for me? *How long can Sarapis hound me? Is there any place I can go?*

He went to the window once more and stood looking at the street.

At the newsstand, Claude St. Cyr tossed down coins, picked up the newspaper.

"Thank you, sir or madam," the robot vender said.

The lead article... St. Cyr blinked and wondered if he had lost his mind. He could not grasp what he was reading — or was unable to read. It made no sense; the homeostatic news-printing system, the fully automated micro-relay newspaper, had evidently broken down. All he found was a procession of words, randomly strung together, worse than *Finnegans Wake*.

Or was it random? One paragraph caught his eye.

> At the hotel window now ready to leap. If you expect to conduct any more business with her you better get over there. She's dependent on him, needs a man since her husband, that Paul Sharp, abandoned her. The Antler Hotel, room 604. I think you have time. Johnny is too hot-headed; shouldn't have tried to bluff her. With my blood you can't be bluffed and she's got my blood. I

St. Cyr said rapidly to Harvey, who stood beside him, "Johnny Barefoot's in a room at the Antler Hotel about to jump, and this is old Sarapis telling us, warning us. We better get over there."

Glancing at him, Harvey said, "Barefoot's on our side; we can't afford to have him take his life. But why would Sarapis —"

"Let's just get over there," St. Cyr said, starting toward his parked 'copter. Harvey followed on the run.

All at once the telephone stopped ringing. Johnny turned from the window — and saw Kathy Sharp standing by it, the receiver in her hand. "He called me," she said.

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"And he told me, Johnny, where you were and what you were going to do."

"Nuts," he said. "I'm not going to do anything." He moved back from the window.

"*He* thought you were," Kathy said.

"Yes, and that proves he can be wrong." He saw that his cigarette had burned down to the filter, he dropped it into the ash-tray on the dresser and stubbed it out.

"My grandfather was always fond of you," Kathy said. "He wouldn't like anything to happen to you."

Shrugging, Johnny said, "As far as I'm concerned I have nothing to do with Louis Sarapis any more."

Kathy had put the receiver to her ear. She paid no attention to Johnny — she was listening to her grandfather. He ceased talking. It was futile.

"He says," Kathy said, "that Claude St. Cyr and Phil Harvey are on their way up here. He told them to come, too."

"Nice of him," he said shortly.

Kathy said, "I'm fond of you, too, Johnny. I can see what my grandfather found about you to like and admire. You genuinely take my welfare seriously, don't you? Maybe I could go into the hospital voluntarily. For a short period anyhow, a week or a few days."

"Would that be enough?" he asked.

"It might." She held the phone out to him. "He wants to talk to you. I think you'd better listen. He'll find a way to reach you in any case, you know."

Reluctantly, Johnny accepted the phone.

"... trouble is you're out of a job and that depresses you. If you're not working you feel you don't amount to anything; that's the kind of person you are. I like that. The same way myself. Listen, I've got a job for you. At the Convention. Doing publicity to make sure Alfonse Gam is nominated; you'd do a swell job. Call Gam. Call Alfonse Gam. Johnny, call Gam. Call — "

Johnny hung up the phone.

"I've got a job," he told Kathy. "Representing Gam. At least Louis says so."

"Would you do that?" Kathy asked. "Be his P. R. man at the nominating convention?"

He shrugged. Why not? Gam would pay well. And certainly he was no worse than the President, Kent Margrave. And — I must get a job, Johnny realized. I have to live. I've got a wife and two children; this is no joke.

"Do you think Gam has a chance this time?" Kathy asked.

"No, not really. But miracles in politics do happen; look at Richard Nixon in the 1970's."

"What is the best route for Gam to follow?"

He eyed her. "I'll talk that over with him. Not with you."

"You're still angry because I won't sell," Kathy said quietly. "Listen, Johnny. Suppose I turned Archimedean over to you."

After a moment he said, "What does Louis say to that?"

"I haven't asked him."

"You know he'd say no. I'm too

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inexperienced. I know the operation, of course; I've been with it from the start. But —"

"Don't sell yourself short," Kathy said softly.

"Please," Johnny said. "Don't lecture me. Let's try to stay friends; cool, distant friends." And if there's one thing I can't stand, he said to himself, it's being lectured by a woman. And for my own good.

The door of the room burst open. Claude St. Cyr and Phil Harvey leaped inside, then saw Kathy, saw him with her, and sagged. "So he got you to come here, too," St. Cyr said to her, panting for breath.

"Yes," she said. "He was very concerned about Johnny." She patted him on the arm. "See how many friends you have? Both warm and cool?"

"Yes," he said; but for some reason felt deeply, miserably sad.

That afternoon Claude St. Cyr found time to drop by the house of Elektra Harvey, his present employer's ex-wife.

"Listen, doll," St. Cyr said, "I'm trying to do good for you in this present deal. If I'm successful —" He put his arms around her and gave her a bear hug. "You'll recover a little of what you lost. Not all, but enough to make you a trifle happier about life in general." He kissed her and, as usual, she responded; she squirmed, effectively, drew him down to her, pressed close in a manner almost uncannily satisfying. It was very pleasant, and in addition it lasted a long time. And that was *not* usual.

Stirring, moving away from him finally, Elektra said, "By the way, can you tell me what ails the phone and the TV? I can't call — there always seems to be someone on the line. And the picture on the TV screen; it's all fuzzy and distorted, and it's always the same, just a sort of *face*."

"Don't worry about it," Claude said. "We're working on that right now, we've got a crew of men out scouting." His men were going from mortuary to mortuary; eventually they'd find Louis' body. And then this nonsense would come to an end . . . to everyone's relief.

Going to the sideboard to fix drinks, Elektra Harvey said, "Does Phil know about us?" She measured out bitters into the whiskey glasses, three drops to each.

"No," St. Cyr said, "and it's none of his business anyhow."

"But Phil has a strong prejudice about ex-wives. He wouldn't like it. He'd get ideas about you being disloyal. Since he dislikes me, you're supposed to, too. That's what Phil calls 'integrity.'"

"I'm glad to know that," St. Cyr said, "but there's damn little I can do about it. Anyhow, he isn't going to find out."

"I can't help being worried, though," Elektra said, bringing him his drink. "I was tuning the TV, you see, and — I know this sounds crazy, but it actually seemed to me —" She broke off. "Well, I actually thought I heard the TV announcer mention us. But he was sort of mumbling, or the reception was bad. But anyhow I did hear that, your

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name and mine." She looked soberly up at him, while absent-mindedly rearranging the strap of her dress.

Chilled, he said, "Dear, it's ridiculous." Going over to the TV set he clicked it on.

Good lord, he thought. Is Louis Sarapis *everywhere?* Does he see everything we do from that locus of his out there in deep space?

It was not exactly a comforting thought, especially since he was trying to involve Louis' granddaughter in a business deal which the old man disapproved of.

He's getting back at me, St. Cyr realized as he reflexively tuned the television set with numbed fingers.

lfonse Gam said, "As a matter of fact, Mr. Barefoot, I intended to call you. I have a wire from Mr. Sarapis advising me to employ you. I do think, however, we'll have to come up with something entirely new. Margrave has a considerable advantage over us."

"True," Johnny admitted. "But let's be realistic. We're going to get help this time — from Louis Sarapis."

"Louis helped last time," Gam pointed out, "and it wasn't sufficient."

"But his help now will be on a different order." After all, Johnny thought, the old man controls all the communication media, the newspapers, radio and TV, even the telephones, God forbid. With such power Louis could do almost anything he chose.

He hardly needs me, he thought caustically. But he did not say that to Alfonse Gam. Apparently Gam did not understand what Louis could do, and after all, a job was a job.

"Have you turned on a TV set lately?" Gam asked. "Or tried to use the phone, or even bought a newspaper? There's nothing but a sort of decaying gibberish coming out. If that's Louis, he's not going to be much help at the Convention. He's — disjointed. Just rambles."

"I know," Johnny said guardedly.

"I'm afraid whatever scheme Louis had for his half-life period has gone wrong," Gam said morosely. He did not look like a man who expected to win an election. "Your admiration for Louis is certainly greater than mine, at this stage. Frankly, Mr. Barefoot, I had a long talk with Mr. St. Cyr, and his concepts were totally discouraging. I'm determined to press on, but frankly —" He gestured. "Claude St. Cyr told me to my face I'm a loser."

"You're going to believe St. Cyr? He's on the other side now, with Phil Harvey." Johnny was astonished to find the man so naive and pliable.

"I told him I was going to win," Gam murmured. "But honest to God, this drivel from every TV set and phone — it's awful. It discourages me. I want to get as far away from it as possible."

Presently Johnny said, "I understand."

"Louis didn't use to be like that," Gam said plaintively. "He just drones on now. Even if he can swing the nomination to me, do I want it? I'm tired, Mr. Barefoot."

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"If you're asking me to give you pep." Johnny said, "you've got the wrong man." The voice from the phone and the TV affected him much the same way. Much too much for him to say anything encouraging to Gam.

"You're in P. R.," Gam said. "Can't you generate enthusiasm where there is none? Convince me, Barefoot, and then I'll convince the world." From his pocket he brought a folded-up telegram. "This is what came from Louis, the other day. Evidently he can interfere with the telegraph lines as well as the other media." He passed it over, and Johnny read it.

"Louis was more coherent when he wrote this," Johnny said.

"That's what I meant! He's deteriorating rapidly. When the Convention begins — and it's only one more day now — what'll he be like? I sense something dreadful here. And I don't care to get mixed up in it." He added, "And yet I want to run. So, Barefoot, you deal with Louis for me; you can be the go-between." He added, "The psycho-pomp."

"What's that mean?"

"The go-between between God and man," Gam said.

Johnny said, "If you use words like that you won't get the nomination; I can promise you that."

Smiling wryly, Gam said, "How about a drink?" He started from his living room, toward the kitchen. "Scotch? Bourbon?"

"Bourbon," Johnny said.

"What do you think of Kathy?"

"I like her," he said. And that was true; he certainly did.

"Even though she's a psychotic, a drug addict, been in jail and on top of that a religious nut?"

"Yes," Johnny said tightly.

"I think you're crazy," Gam said, returning with the drinks. "But I agree with you. She's a good person. I've known her for some time, as a matter of fact. Frankly, I don't know why she took the bent that she has. I'm not a psychologist . . . probably, though, it has something to do with Louis. She has a peculiar sort of devotion to him, a kind of loyalty that's both infantile and fanatic. And, to me, touchingly sweet."

Sipping his drink, Johnny said, "This is terrible bourbon."

"Old Sir Muskrat," Gam said, grimacing. "I agree."

"You better serve a better drink," Johnny said, "or you really are through in politics."

"That's why I need you," Gam said. "You see?"

"I see," Johnny said, carrying his drink into the kitchen to pour it back in the bottle — and to take a look at the Scotch instead.

"How are you going about getting me elected?" Alfonse Gam asked.

Johnny said, "I — think our best approach, our only approach, is to make use of the sentimentality people feel about Louis' death. I saw the lines of mourners. It was impressive, Alfonse. Day after day they came. When he was alive, many persons feared his power. But now they can breathe easier. He's gone, and the frightening aspects of —"

Gam interrupted, "But Johnny,

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he's not gone! That's the whole point. You know that gibbering *thing* on the phones and on TV — that's him!"

"But they don't know it," Johnny said. "The public is baffled — just as the first person to pick it up was baffled. That technician at Kennedy Slough." Emphatically, he said, "Why should they connect an electrical emanation one light-week away from Earth with Louis Sarapis?"

After a moment Gam said, "I think you're making an error, Johnny. But Louis said to hire you, and I'm going to. And you have a free hand. I'll depend on your experience."

"Thanks," Johnny said. "You can depend on me." But inside, he was not so sure. Maybe the public is smarter than I realize, he thought. *Maybe I'm making a mistake...* but what other approach was there? None that he could dream up; either they made use of Gam's tie with Louis or they had absolutely nothing by which to recommend him.

A slender thread on which to base the campaign for nomination — and only a day before the Convention convened. He did not like it.

The telephone in Gam's living room rang.

"That's probably him," Gam said. "You want to talk to him? To be truthful, I'm afraid to take it off the hook."

"Let it ring," Johnny said. He agreed with Gam; it was just too damn unpleasant.

"But we can't evade him if he wants to get in touch with us. If it isn't the phone it's the newspaper. And yesterday I tried to use my electric typewriter. Instead of the letter I intended to compose I got the same mishmash — I got a text from *him*."

Neither of them moved to take the phone. It rang on.

"Do you want an advance?" Gam asked.

"I'd appreciate it," Johnny said. "Today I quit my job with Archimedean."

Reaching into his coat for his wallet, Gam said, "I'll give you a check," He eyed Johnny. "You like her but you can't work with her; is that it?"

"That's it," Johnny said. He did not elaborate, and Gam did not press him any further. Gam was, if nothing else, gentlemanly. And Johnny appreciated it.

As the check changed hands the phone stopped ringing.

Was there a link between the two? Johnny wondered. Or was it just chance? No way to tell. Louis seemed to know everything. This was what Louis had wanted; he had told both of them that.

"I guess we did the right thing," Gam said tartly. "Listen, Johnny. I hope you can get back on good terms with Kathy Egmont Sharp. For her sake. She needs help."

Johnny grunted.

"Now that you're not working for her, make one more try," Gam said. "Okay?"

"I'll think about it," Johnny said.

"She's a very sick girl, and she's got a lot of responsibility now. You know that, too. Whatever caused

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the rift between you — try to come to some kind of understanding *before it's too late.* That's the only proper way."

Johnny said nothing. But he knew, inside him, that Gam was right.

And yet — how could he do it? He didn't know how. How do you approach a psychotic person? he wondered. How do you repair such a deep rift? It was hard enough in regular situations . . . and this had so many overtones.

"What does your wife think of her?" Gam asked.

Startled, he said, "Sarah Belle? She's never met Kathy. Why do you ask?"

Gam eyed him and said nothing.

"Damn odd question," Johnny said.

"Damn odd girl, that Kathy," Gam said. "Odder than you think, my friend." He did not elaborate.

To Claude St. Cyr, Phil Harvey said, "There's something I want to know. Something we must have the answer to, or we'll never get control of the voting stock of Wilhelmina. *Where's the body?*"

"We're looking," St. Cyr said patiently. "We're trying all of the mortuaries, one by one. But money's involved. Undoubtedly someone's paying them to keep quiet, and if we want them to talk —"

"That girl," Harvey said, "is going on instructions from beyond the grave. Despite the fact that Louis is devolving, she still pays attention to him. It's — unnatural." He shook his head, repelled.

"I agree," St. Cyr said. "In fact, you expressed it perfectly. This morning when I was shaving I picked him up on the TV." He shuddered visibly. "I mean, it's coming at us from every side now."

Harvey said, "Today is the first day of the Convention." He looked out of the window, at the cars and people. "Louis' attention will be tied up there, trying to help Johnny swing the vote onto Alfonse Gam. Now perhaps we can operate with more success. Do you see? Maybe he's forgotten about Kathy. My God, he can't watch everything at once."

St. Cyr said quietly, "But Kathy is not at Archimedean now."

"Where is she, then? In Delaware? At Wilhelmina Securities? It ought to be easy to find her."

"She's sick," St. Cyr said. "In a hospital, Phil. She was admitted last night, for her drug addiction."

There was silence.

"You know a lot," Harvey said finally. "Where'd you learn this, anyhow?"

"From listening to the phone and the TV. But I don't know where the hospital is. It could even be off Earth, on Luna or on Mars, even back where she came from. I got the impression she's extremely ill. Johnny's abandoning her set her back greatly." He gazed at his employer somberly. "That's all I know, Phil."

"Do you think Johnny Barefoot knows where she is?"

"I doubt it."

Pondering, Harvey said, "I'll bet she tries to call him. I'll bet he either knows or will know, soon. If we only could manage to put a

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snoop-circuit on his phone . . . get his calls routed through here."

"But the phones," St. Cyr said wearily. "Just gibberish. The interference from Louis." He wondered what became of Archimedean Enterprises if Kathy were declared unable to manage her affairs, if she was forcibly committed. Very complicated, depending on whether Earth law or —

Harvey was saying, "We can't find her and we can't find the body. And meanwhile the Convention's on, and they'll nominate that wretched Gam, that creature of Louis'. And next we know, he'll be President." He eyed St. Cyr with antagonism. "So far you haven't done me much good, Claude."

"We'll try all the hospitals. But there're tens of thousands of them. And if it isn't in this area it could be anywhere." He felt helpless. Around and around we go, he thought, and we get nowhere.

Well, we can keep monitoring the TV, he decided. That's some help.

"I'm going to the Convention," Harvey announced. "I'll see you later. If you should come up with something —which I doubt — you can get in touch with me there." He strode to the door, and a moment later St. Cyr found himself alone.

Doggone it, St. Cyr said to himself, what'll I do now? Maybe I ought to go to the Convention, too.

But there was one more mortuary he wanted to check; his men had been there, but he also wanted to give it a try personally. It was just the sort that Louis would have liked, run by an unctuous individual named, revoltingly, Herbert Schoenheit von Vogelsang, which meant, in German, Herbert Beauty of the Bird's Song — a fitting name for a man who ran the Beloved Brethren Mortuary in downtown Los Angeles, with branches in Chicago, New York and Cleveland.

When he reached the mortuary, Claude St. Cyr demanded to see Schoenheit von Vogelsang personally. The place was doing a rush business; Resurrection Day was just around the corner and the petite bourgeoise, who flocked in great numbers to just such ceremonies, were lined up waiting to retrieve their half-lifer relatives.

"Yes, sir," Schoenheit von Vogelsang said, when at last he appeared at the counter in the mortuary's business office. "You asked to speak to me."

St. Cyr laid his business card down on the counter; the card still described him as legal consultant for Archimedean Enterprises. "I am Claude St. Cyr," he declared. "You may have heard of me."

Glancing at the card, Schoenheit von Vogelsang blanched and mumbled, "I give you my word, Mr. St. Cyr, we're trying, we're really trying. We've spent out of our own funds over a thousand dollars in trying to make contact with him; we've had high-gain equipment flown in from Japan where it was developed and made. And still no results." Tremulously, he backed away from the counter. "You can come and see for yourself Frankly, I believe someone's doing it on purpose. A

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complete failure like this can't occur naturally, if you see what I mean."

St. Cyr said, "Let me see him."

"Certainly." The mortuary owner, pale and agitated, led the way through the building into the chill bin, until at last St. Cyr saw ahead the casket which had lain in state, the casket of Louis Sarapis. "Are you planning any sort of litigation?" the mortuary owner asked fearfully. "I assure you, we—"

"I'm here," St. Cyr stated, "merely to take the body. Have your men load it onto a truck for me."

"Yes, Mr. St. Cyr," Herb Schoenheit von Vogelsang said in meek obedience; he waved two mortuary employees over and began giving them instructions. "Do you have a truck with you, Mr. St. Cyr?" he asked.

"You may provide it," St. Cyr said, in a forbidding voice.

Shortly the body in its casket was loaded onto a mortuary truck, and the driver turned to St. Cyr for instructions.

St. Cyr gave him Phil Harvey's address.

"And the litigation," Herb Schoenheit von Vogelsang was murmuring, as St. Cyr boarded the truck to sit beside the driver. "You don't infer malpractice on our part, do you, Mr. St. Cyr? Because if you do—"

"The affair is closed as far as we're concerned," St. Cyr said to him laconically, and signalled the driver to drive off.

As soon as they had left the mortuary, St. Cyr began to laugh.

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"What strikes you so funny?" the mortuary driver asked.

"Nothing," St. Cyr said, still, chuckling.

When the body in its casket, still deep in its original quick-pack, had been left off at Harvey's home and the driver had departed, St. Cyr picked up the telephone and dialed. But he found himself unable to get through to the Convention Hall. All he heard, for his trouble, was the weird, distant drumming, the monotonous litany of Louis Sarapis — he hung up, disgusted but at the same time grimly determined.

We've had enough of that, St. Cyr said to himself. I won't wait for Harvey's approval; I don't need it.

Searching the living room he found, in a desk drawer, a heat gun. Pointing it at the casket of Louis Sarapis he pressed the trigger.

The envelope of quick-pack steamed up. The casket itself fizzed as the plastic melted. Within, the body blackened, shriveled, charred away at last into a baked, coal-like clinker, small and nondescript.

Satisfied, St. Cyr returned the heat gun to the desk drawer.

Once more he picked up the phone and dialed.

In his ear the monotonous voice intoned, "... no one but Gam can do it; Gam's the man what am — good slogan for you, Johnny. Gam's the man what am; remember that. I'll do the talking. Give me the mike and I'll tell them; Gam's the man what am. Gam's —"

Claude St. Cyr slammed down the phone, turned to the blackened deposit that had been Louis Sarapis; he gaped mutely at what he could not comprehend. The voice, when St. Cyr turned on the television set, emanated from that, too, just as it had been doing.

Nothing had changed!

The voice of Louis Sarapis was not originating in the body. Because the body was gone. There simply was no connection between them.

Seating himself in a chair, Claude St. Cyr got out his cigarettes and shakily lit up, trying to understand what this meant. It seemed almost as if he had it, almost had the explanation.

But not quite.

By monorail — he had left his 'copter at the Beloved Brethren Mortuary — Claude St. Cyr numbly made his way to Convention Hall. The place, of course, was packed. The noise was terrible. But he managed to obtain the services of a robot page. Over the public address system, Phil Harvey's presence was requested in one of the side rooms used as meeting places by delegations wishing to caucus in secret.

Harvey appeared, disheveled from shoving through the dense pack of spectators and delegates. "What is it, Claude?" he asked, and then he saw his attorney's face. "You better tell me," he said quietly.

St. Cyr blurted, "The voice we hear. It isn't Louis! It's someone else trying to sound like Louis!"

"How do you know?"

He told him what he had done.

Nodding, Harvey said, "And it definitely was Louis' body you de-

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stroyed? There was no deceit there at the mortuary — you're positive of that?"

"I'm not positive," St. Cyr said. "But I think it was. I believe it now and I believed it at the time." It was too late to find out now, in any case. Not enough remained of the body for an analysis.

"But who could it be, then?" Harvey said. "My God, it's coming to us from beyond the solar system! Could it be nonterrestrials of some kind? Some sort of echo or mockery, a non-living reaction unfamiliar to us? An inert process without intent?"

St. Cyr laughed. "You're babbling, Phil. Cut it out."

Harvey nodded. "Whatever you say, Claude. If you think it's someone here —"

"I don't know," St. Cyr said candidly. "But I'd guess it's someone right on this planet, someone who knew Louis well. He was silent then. That was as far as he could carry his logical processes . . . beyond that he saw nothing. It was a blank, and a frightening one.

There is, he thought, an element of the deranged in it. What we took to be decay is more madness than degeneration. Or is madness itself degeneration? He did not know; he wasn't trained in the field of psychiatry, except regarding its legal aspects. And the legal aspects had no application here.

"Has anyone nominated Gam yet?" he asked Harvey.

"Not yet. It's expected to come sometime today, though. A delegate from Montana will do it."

"Johnny Barefoot is here?"

"Yes." Harvey nodded. "Busy as can be, lining up delegates. In and out of the different delegations, very much in evidence. No sign of Gam, of course. He won't come in until near the end of the nominating speech and then of course all hell will break loose. Cheering and parading and waving banners . . . the Gam supporters are all prepared."

"Any indication of —" St. Cyr hesitated — "what we've assumed to be Louis?"

"None as yet," Harvey said.

"I think we'll hear from it before the day is over."

Harvey nodded; he thought so, too.

"Are you afraid of it?" St. Cyr asked.

"Sure," Harvey said. "A thousand times more so than ever, now that we don't know what it is."

"You're right to take that attitude," St. Cyr said. He felt the same way.

"Perhaps we should tell Johnny," Harvey said.

St. Cyr said, "Let him find out on his own."

"All right, Claude," Harvey said. "Anything you say. After all, it was you who finally found Louis' body. I have complete faith in you."

In a way, St. Cyr thought, I wish I didn't know what I know now; we were better off believing it was old Louis talking to us from every phone, newspaper and TV set.

That was bad — but this is far worse. Although, he thought, it seems to me that the answer is there, somewhere, just waiting.

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I must try, he told himself. Try to get it. *Try!*

Off by himself in a side room, Johnny Barefoot tensely watched the events of the Convention on closed-circuit TV. The invading presence from one light-week away had cleared for a time, and he could see and hear the delegate from Montana delivering the nominating speech for Alfonse Gam.

He felt tired. The whole process of the Convention, its speeches and parades, its tautness, grated on his nerves, ran contrary to his disposition. So damn much show, he thought. Display for what? If Gam wanted to gain the nomination he could get it, and all the rest of this was purposeless.

His own thoughts were on Kathy Egmont Sharp.

He had not seen her since her departure for U.C. Hospital in San Francisco. At this point he had no idea of her condition, whether she had responded to therapy or not.

A deep intuition said she had not.

How sick really was Kathy? Probably very sick, with or without drugs. Perhaps she would never be discharged from U.C. Hospital.

On the other hand — if she wanted out, *she would find a way to get out*. That he intuited, too, even more strongly.

So it was up to her. She had committed herself to the hospital voluntaily. And she would come out — if she ever did — the same way. No one could compel Kathy . . . she was simply not that sort of person. And that, he realized, could well be a symptom of the illness-process.

The door to the room opened. He glanced up from the TV screen.

And saw Claude St. Cyr standing in the entrance. St. Cyr held a heat gun in his hand, pointed at Johnny. He said, "Where is Kathy?"

"I don't know," Johnny said. He got warily to his feet.

"You do. I'll kill you if you don't tell me."

"Why?" he said, wondering what had brought St. Cyr to this point of extreme behavior.

St. Cyr said, "Is it on Earth?"

"Yes," Johnny said, with reluctance.

"Give me the name of the city."

"What are you going to do?" Johnny said. "This isn't like you, Claude; you used to always work within the law."

St. Cyr said, "I think the voice is Kathy. I know it's not Louis, now; we have that to go on but beyond that it's just a guess. *Kathy is the only one I know deranged enough, deteriorated enough.* Give me the name of the hospital."

"The only way you could know it isn't Louis," Johnny said, "would be to destroy the body."

"That's right," St. Cyr said, nodding.

Then you have, Johnny realized. You got to Herb Schoenheit van Vogelsang. So that was that.

The door to the room burst open again; a group of cheering delegates, Gam supporters, marched in, blowing horns and hurling streamers, carrying huge hand-painted placards. St. Cyr turned toward them, waving his gun at them — and Johnny Bare-

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foot sprinted past the delegates, to the door and out into the corridor.

He ran down the corridor and a moment later emerged at the great central hall in which Gam's demonstration was in full swing. From the loud-speakers mounted at the ceiling a voice boomed over and over.

"Vote for Gam, the man what am. Gam, Gam, vote for Gam, vote for Gam, the one fine man; vote for Gam who really am. Gam, Gam, Gam, he really am — "

Kathy, he thought. It just can't be you! He ran on, out of the hall, squeezing past the dancing, delirious delegates, past the glazed-eyed men and women in their funny hats, their banners wiggling . . . he reached the street, the parked 'copters and cars, throngs of people clustered about, trying to push inside.

If it is you, he thought, then you're too sick ever to come back, even if you will yourself to. Had you been waiting for Louis to die, is that it? Do you hate us? Or are you afraid of us? What explains what it is you're doing . . . what's the *reason* for it?

He hailed a 'copter marked Taxi. "To San Francisco," he instructed the driver.

Maybe you're not conscious that you're doing it, he thought. Maybe it's an autonomous process, rising out of your unconscious mind. Your mind split into two portions, one on the surface we see, the other one —

The one we hear.

Should we feel sorry for you? Or should we hate and fear you? *How much harm can you do?* I guess that's the real issue. I love you, he thought. In some fashion, at least. I care about you, and that's a form of love, not such as I feel toward my wife or my children, but it is a concern. Damn it, he thought, this is dreadful! Maybe St. Cyr is wrong; maybe it isn't you.

The 'copter swept upward into the sky, cleared the buildings and turned west, its blades spinning at peak velocity . . .

On the ground, standing in front of the convention hall, St. Cyr and Phil Harvey watched the 'copter go.

"Well, so it worked," St. Cyr said. "I got him started moving. I'd guess he's on his way either to Los Angeles or to San Francisco."

A second 'copter slid up before them, hailed by Phil Harvey. The two men entered it, and Harvey said, "You see the taxi that just took off? Stay behind it, just within sight. But don't let it catch a glimpse of you if you can help it."

"Heck," the driver said, "if I can see it, it can see me." But he clicked on his meter and began to ascend. Grumpily, he said to Harvey and St. Cyr, "I don't like this kind of stuff; it can be dangerous."

St. Cyr told him, "Turn on your radio if you want to hear something that's dangerous."

"Aw, hell," the driver said, disgusted. "The radio don't work. Some kind of interference, like sun spots or maybe some amateur operator — I lost a lot of fares because the dispatcher can't get hold of me. I think the police ought to do something about it, don't you?"

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St. Cyr said nothing. Beside him, Harvey peered at the 'copter ahead.

When he reached U.C. Hospital at San Francisco, and had landed at the field on the main building's roof, Johnny Barefoot saw the second ship circling, not passing on, and he knew that he was right! he had been followed all the way. But he did not care. It didn't matter.

Descending by means of the stairs, he came out on the third floor and approached a nurse. "Mrs. Sharp," he said. "Where is she?"

"You'll have to ask at the desk," the nurse said. "And visiting hours aren't until — "

He rushed on until he found the desk.

"Mrs. Sharp's room is 309," the bespectacled, elderly nurse at the desk said. "But you must have Doctor Gross' permission to visit her. And I believe Doctor Gross is having lunch right now and probably won't be back until two o'clock, if you'd care to wait." She pointed to a waiting room.

"Thanks," he said. "I'll wait." He passed through the waiting room and out the door at the far end, down the corridor, watching the numbers on the doors until he saw room number 309. Opening the door he entered the room, shut the door after him and looked around for her.

There was the bed, but it was empty.

"Kathy," he said.

At the window, in her robe, she turned, her face sly and bound up by hatred. Her lips moved and, staring at him, she said with loathing, "I want Gam because he am." Spitting at him, she crept toward him, her hands raised, her fingers writhing. "Gam's a man, a *real* man," she whispered, and in her eyes he saw the dissolved remnants of her personality expire even as he stood there. "Gam, gam, gam," she whispered, and slapped him.

He retreated. "It's you," he said. "Claude St. Cyr was right. Okay. I'll go." He fumbled for the door behind him, trying to get it open. Panic passed through him like a wind then. He wanted nothing but to get away. "Kathy," he said, "let go." Her nails had dug into him, into his shoulder, and she hung onto him, peering sideways into his face, smiling at him.

"You're dead," she said. "Go away. I smell the dead inside you."

"I'll go," he said, and managed to find the handle of the door. She let go of him then. He saw her right hand flash up, the nails directed at his eyes — he ducked, and her blow missed him. "I want to get away," he said, covering his face with his arms.

Kathy whispered, "I am Gam, I am. I'm the only one who am. Am alive. Gam, alive." She laughed. "Yes, I will," she said, mimicking his voice perfectly. "Claude St. Cyr was right. Okay, I'll go. I'll go." She was now between him and the door. "The window," she said. "Do it now, what you wanted to do when I stopped you." She hurried toward him, and he retreated, backward, step by step, until he felt the wall behind him.

"It's all in your mind," he said, "this hate. Everyone is fond of you.

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I am, Gam is, St. Cyr and Harvey are. What's the point of this?"

"The point," Kathy said, "is that I show you what you're really like. Don't you know yet? You're even worse than me. I'm just being honest."

"Why did you pretend to be Louis?" he said.

"I am Louis," Kathy said. "When he died he didn't go into half-life because I ate him. He became me. I was waiting for that. Alfonse and I had it all worked out, the transmitter out there with the recorded tape ready — we frightened you, didn't we? You're all too scared to stand in his way. He'll be nominated. He's been nominated already, I feel it, I know it."

"Not yet," Johnny said.

"But it won't be long," Kathy said. "And I'll be his wife." She smiled at him. "And you'll be dead, you and the others." Coming at him she chanted, "I am Gam, I am Louis and when you're dead I'll be you, Johnny Barefoot, and all the rest; I'll eat you all." She opened her mouth wide and he saw the sharp, jagged, pale-as-death teeth.

"And rule over the dead," Johnny said, and hit her with all his strength, on the side of her face, near the jaw.

She spun backward, fell, and then at once was up and rushing at him. Before she could catch him he sprinted away, to one side, caught then a glimpse of her distorted, shredded features, ruined by the force of his blow — and then the door to the room opened, and St. Cyr and Phil Harvey, with two of the nurses, stood there. Kathy stopped. He stopped, too.

"Come on, Barefoot," St. Cyr said, jerking his head.

Johnny crossed the room and joined them.

Tying the sash of her robe, Kathy said matter-of-factly, "So it was planned. Johnny was to kill me, and the rest of you would all stand and watch and enjoy it."

"They have an immense transmitter out there," Johnny said. "They placed it a long time ago, possibly years back. All this time they've been waiting for Louis to die. Maybe they even killed him, finally. The idea's to get Gam nominated and elected, while keeping everyone terrorized with that transmission. She's sick. Much sicker than we realized, even sicker than *you* realized. Most of it was under the surface where it didn't show."

St. Cyr shrugged. "Well, she'll have to be certified." He was calm but unusually slow-spoken. "The will named me as trustee. I can represent the estate against her, file the committment papers and then come forth at the sanity hearing."

"I'll demand a jury trial," Kathy said. "I can convince a jury of my sanity; it's actually quite easy and I've been through it before."

"Possibly," St. Cyr said. "But anyhow the transmitter will be gone. By that time the authorities will be out there."

"It'll take months to reach it," Kathy said. "Even by the fastest ship. And by then the election will be over and Alfonse will be President."

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St. Cyr glanced at Johnny Barefoot. "Maybe so." he murmured.

"That's why we put it out so far," Kathy said. "It was Alfonse's money and my ability. I inherited Louis' ability — you see, I can do anything. Nothing is impossible for me if I want it; all I have to do is want it *enough*."

"You wanted me to jump," Johnny said. "And I didn't."

"You would have in another minute," Kathy said. "If they hadn't come in." She seemed quite poised now. "You will, eventually. I'll keep after you. And there's no place you can hide, you know I'll follow you and find you. All three of you." Her gaze swept from one of them to the next, taking them all in.

Harvey said, "I've got a little power and wealth, too. I think we can defeat Gam, even if he's nominated."

"You have power," Kathy said, "but not imagination, and what you have isn't enough. Not against me." She spoke quietly, with complete confidence.

"Let's go," Johnny said, and started down the hall, away from room 309 and Kathy Egmont Sharp.

X

Up and down San Francisco's hilly streets Johnny walked, hands in his pockets, ignoring the buildings and people, seeing nothing, merely walking on and on. Afternoon faded, because evening; the lights of the city came on and he ignored that. Soon he knew that he was very hungry — that it was now ten o'clock at night and he had not eaten anything since morning. He stopped then and looked around him.

Where were Claude St. Cyr and Phil Harvey? He could not remember having parted from them; he did not even remember leaving the hospital. But Kathy; he remembered that. He could not forget it even if he wanted to. And he did not want to. It was too important ever to be forgotten, by any of them who had witnessed it, understood it.

At a newsstand he saw the massive, thick-black headlines.

GAM WINS NOD,
PROMISES BATTLING
CAMPAIGN FOR
NOVEMBER ELECTION

So she did get that, Johnny thought. They did, the two of them; they got what they're after exactly. And now — all they have to do is defeat Kent Margrave. And that thing out there, a light-week away, is still yammering, and will be for months.

They'll win, he realized.

At a drugstore he found a phone booth. He put money into the slot and dialed Sarah Belle, his own home phone number.

The phone clicked in his ear. And then the familiar monotonous voice chanted, "Gam in November, Gam in November; win with Gam, President Alfonse Gam, our man — I am for Gam. *I am for Gam. For GAM!*" He rang off and left the phone booth. It was hopeless.

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At the counter of the drugstore he ordered a sandwich and coffee; he sat eating mechanically, filling the requirements of his body without pleasure or desire, eating by reflex until the food was gone and it was time to pay the bill. What can I do? he asked himself. What can anyone do? All the means of communication have been taken over. *They* have the radio, TV, newspapers, phone, wire services . . . everything that depends on micro-wave transmission or open-gap electric circuitry. They've captured it all, left nothing for us, the opposition, by which to fight back.

Defeat, he thought. That's the dreary reality that lies ahead for us. And then, when they enter office, it'll be our death.

"That'll be a dollar ten," the counter girl said.

He paid for his meal and left the drugstore.

When a 'copter marked *Taxi* came spiraling by, he hailed it.

"Take me home," he said.

"Okay," the driver said amiably. "Where is home, buddy?"

He gave him the address in Chicago and then settled back for the long ride. He was giving up. He was quitting, going back to Sarah Belle, to his wife and children. The fight — for him — apparently was over.

When she saw him standing in the doorway, Sarah Belle said, "Good God, Johnny, you look terrible." She kissed him and led him into the warm, familiar living room. "I thought you'd be out celebrating."

"*Celebrating?*" he said hoarsely.

"Your man won the nomination." She went to put the coffee pot on for him.

"Oh, yeah," he said, nodding. "That's right. I was his P.R. man; I forgot."

"Better lie down," Sarah Belle said. "Johnny, I've never seen you look so beaten; I can't understand it. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing," he said.

"Is that Louis Sarapis on all the TV and phones? It sounds like him. I was talking to the Nelsons and they said it's Louis' exact voice."

"No," he said. "It's not Louis. Louis is dead."

"But his period of half-life — "

He said, "He's dead. Forget about it."

Sarah Belle was silent, for a minute. And then she said, "One thing they said — you won't like to hear it, I guess. The Nelsons are plain, quite commonplace people. They said even if Alfonse Gam got the nomination they wouldn't vote for him. They just don't like him."

He grunted.

"Does that make you feel bad?" Sarah Belle asked. "I think they're reacting to the pressure, Louis' pressure on the TV and phones. They just don't care for it. I think you've been excessive, Johnny."

Rising to his feet, he said, "I'm going to visit Phil Harvey. I'll be back later on."

She watched him go out the door, her eyes darkened with concern.

When he was admitted to Phil Harvey's house he found Phil and Gertrude Harvey and Claude

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St. Cyr sitting together in the living room, each with a glass in hand, but no one speaking. Harvey glanced up at him briefly and then looked away.

"Are we going to give up?" he asked Harvey.

Harvey said, "I'm in touch with Kent Margrave. We're going to try to knock out the transmitter. But it's a million to one shot."

"But that's at least something," Johnny said. It would at least be before the election; it would give them several weeks in which to campaign. "Does Margrave understand the situation?"

"Yes," Claude St. Cyr said. "We told him virtually everything."

"But that's not enough," Phil Harvey said. "There's one more thing we must do. You want to be in on it? Draw for the shortest match?" He pointed to the coffee table; on it Johnny saw three matches, one of them broken in half. Now Phil Harvey added a fourth whole match.

St. Cyr said, "Her first. Her right away, as soon as possible. And then later on if necessary, Alfonse Gam."

Weary, cold fright filled Johnny Barefoot.

"Take a match," Harvey said, picking up the four matches, arranging and rearranging them in his hand and then holding out the four even tops to the other people in the room. "Go ahead, Johnny. You got here last so I'll have you go first."

"I was in love with her," Johnny said. "I still am."

Nodding, Phil Harvey said, "Yes, I know."

His heart leaden, Johnny said, "Okay. I'll draw." Reaching, he selected one of the matches.

It was the broken one.

"I got it," he said. "It's me."

"Can you do it?" Claude St. Cyr asked him.

He was silent for a time. And then he shrugged and said, "Sure I can do it. Why not?" Why not indeed? A woman that I was falling in love with; certainly I can murder her, because there is no other way out.

"It may not be as difficult as we think," St. Cyr said. "We've consulted some of Phil's technicians and we picked up some interesting advice. Most of their transmissions are coming from nearby, not a light-week away by any means. I'll tell you how we know. Their transmissions have kept up with changing events. For example, your suicide attempt at the Antler Hotel. *There was no time-lapse there or anywhere else.*"

"And they're not supernatural, Johnny," Gertrude Harvey said.

"So the first thing to do," St. Cyr continued, "is to find their base here on Earth or at least here in the solar system. It would be Gam's guinea fowl ranch on Io. Try there, if you find she's left the hospital."

"Okay," Johnny said, nodding slightly.

"Do you have a gun?" St. Cyr asked.

"Yes.

"Good luck," Gertrude said, after him.

Johnny opened the front door and stepped outside alone, out into the dark, cold evening. END

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To select people with writing talent worth developing, the 12 Famous Writers have designed a revealing Talent Test. The coupon will bring you a copy, along with a brochure about the School. Your completed Test will be graded without charge or obligation by one of the School's instructors. If your Test indicates writing talent, you are then eligible to enroll in the School. You are, however, under absolutely no obligation to do so.

Famous Writers School
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Miss
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